VESA NENYE

PETER MUNTER · TONI WIRTANEN · CHRIS BIRKS

FINLAND AT WAR

THE CONTINUATION AND LAPLAND WARS 1941–45

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WITH PETER MUNTER, TONI WIRTANEN AND CHRIS BIRKS

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DEDICATION

To our children and to future generations. Remembering those countless unsung heroes whose sacrifices paid the price of freedom.

Lapsillemme ja tuleville sukupolville. Muistaen niitä tuhansia joiden uhraukset lunastivat meille vapauden.

This rendition of Akseli Gallen-Kallela's 'The Defense of the Sampo' was painted by Angelika Rasmus. It depicts Marshal Mannerheim leading the stalwart men of Finland in their defense of the Maiden of Finland against Stalin's legions.

LEX

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We entered into this project with the goal of writing the kind of book about Finland's wars that we have always wanted to read ourselves; one that describes the most important battles, accompanied by plenty of contemporary pictures and clarifying maps. The first volume, which covers Finland's struggle for independence and the legendary battles of the Winter War is already out. This, the second tome, continues the narrative beginning from the uneasy Interim Peace, charting Finland's path into the Continuation War and the renewed struggle against the Soviet Union. We go on to explore the bitter peace terms which in turn lead directly into the War of Lapland against the former co-belligerent German armies.

We owe a special debt to the plethora of writers who have already covered this topic and are frequently referenced in the text. It is worth noting that many of the sources are often conflicting or contradictory, thus in order to chart the actual course of events we have tried to use contemporary sources and unit war diaries as widely as possible. Thanks to the extensive and vigorous research of recent years, many documents in the former Soviet archives have now seen the light of day. Unfortunately, it is clear that many of these source materials were considerably manipulated either during or after the war. Ultimately, we hope we have created an accurate yet entertaining recount of those demanding times. As writers we would welcome any feedback or constructive criticism directly. You can reach us at vnenye@hotmail.com

The biggest change since the first book is that our dear friend Chris Birks took an even more active role and must therefore be celebrated as a full co-author. As with the first volume, *Finland at War: The Winter War 1939–40*, this project would never have been possible without the support and help of many people. We would like thank Marcus Cowper and his team of Osprey Publishing who has been instrumental in keeping us on track and on time. A special mention to Nikolai Bogdanovic for being able to cut down our manuscript and for being such an incredible well of knowledge throughout the editorial process.

Thanks to John Stallard of Warlord Games for his introductions and recommendations that started all of this in the first place. Further editing and feedback was provided by Steve Morgan and Steve Yates as well as Lauri Priha and Captain Mick Poussa. For access to their archives and help throughout the process we would like to thank: Jari Saurio, the Museum Curator from the Armour Museum at Parola, for his encouragement and feedback throughout the editing process; Engineer Major Reserves Esa Muikku, who gave us access to his valuable, previously unpublished private collections; Tanker Jerry Riipinen, for his photography and for all his help; the Chairman of the Armoured Museum Trust, Jari Lemmetyinen; Armi Häkkinen, who pored over and made legible hundreds of pages of old handwritten war diaries and unit logs; and finally Sakke and Kirsti Nenye, who helped with the contacts and personal archives and again undertook the massive task of preparing all the chosen photographs.

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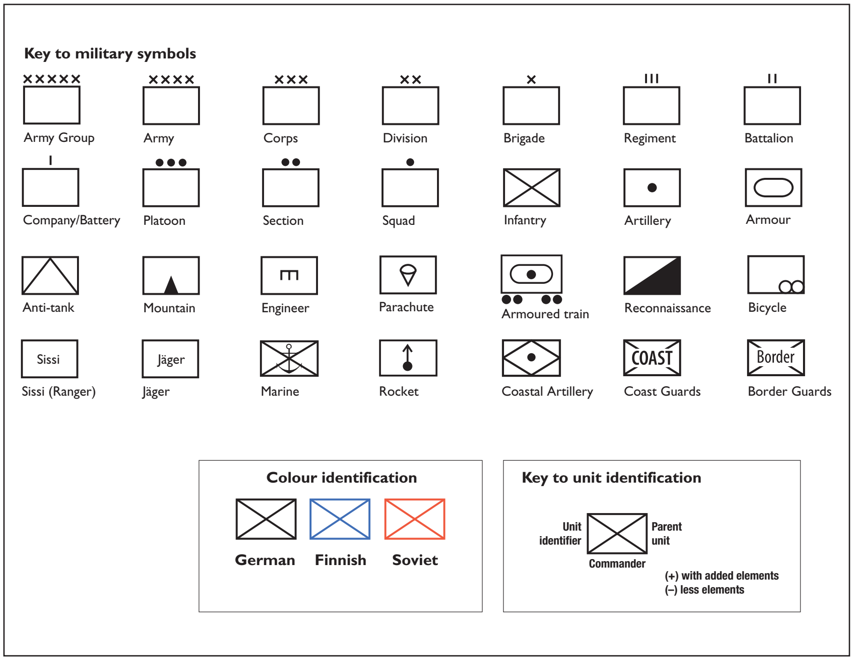
inspirational repertoire of war stories and books.

Most of all we owe thanks to our families, who supported us throughout this enthralling project.

Sarah and Ronja Helena May Nenye
Martta Welma Elisabeth and Jannika Wirtanen
Folke, Nora and Niklas Munter and Minna Wilenius
Eleanor and Signe Birks and Ragnhild Krüger

Take heed reader, there is much we can learn from history, lest it repeats itself.



CHRONOLOGY

The dates in this section follow on directly from the signing of the Moscow Peace Treaty and the end of the Winter War, through to the end of World War II and its repercussions for Finland.

1940

13 March
The Moscow Peace Treaty is signed. The ceasefire comes into effect at 11:00am (Finnish time), ending the Winter War. Blatantly ignoring the ceasefire, Cyril Meretskov orders the attack on Viipuri to continue until the city is in Soviet hands.

15 March
Finland's flag is lowered at Viipuri. Troops start to withdraw behind the new borders agreed in the Moscow Peace Treaty. The Soviet Seventh Army is finally able to take the ground denied them during the war.

30 March
The Soviet Union declares that the forming of a Scandinavian defence force would be considered a hostile act.

9 April
Germany invades Denmark and Norway.

May
Sweden approaches Finland to propose a military alliance.

10 May
Germany invades France and the Low Countries.

22 May
Foundation of the Finland–Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society; its secret aim is to destabilise Finland's government.

14 June
The Finnish passenger plane *Kaleva* is shot down by the Soviets over Finnish territorial waters whilst returning from Estonia.
German troops enter Paris.

15–16 June
The USSR demands that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia form new governments and that they grant military access to the Red Army.

17 June
Soviet forces deploy to the Baltic states. Soon Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia 'ask' to become members of the USSR.

18 June
The Finnish parliament passes law for the resettlement of Karelian refugees.

22 June
France surrenders.

23 June
Rights to the Petsamo nickel deposits are demanded by the USSR.

26 June
The Soviet Union demands Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina from Romania.

27 June
The Soviet Union demands the demilitarisation of the Åland Islands.
The Soviet demands presented to Romania are met in full.

29 June
Finland establishes a trade treaty with Germany.

8 July
Sweden agrees to allow German troops to pass through its territory.

8 July
The USSR demands passage to the leased Hanko Peninsula.

21 July
The Baltic states declare themselves to be Soviet republics.

22 July
First mention of Finland as a viable route of attack against the Soviet Union is recorded in the personal diary of General Franz Halder.

23 July
Finland promises to sell 60 per cent of its nickel production for the year to Germany.

24 July
Finnish Minister of Supply Väinö Tanner's resignation is called for by the USSR.

31 July
Hitler decides to attack the Soviet Union.

4 August
The Finnish National Brothers in Arms Association is founded.

9 August
The law for the compensation of lost property for Winter War refugees is ratified.

15 August
Väinö Tanner resigns following Soviet pressure.

17 August
German Lieutenant-Colonel Josef Veltjens approaches Mannerheim to ask for permission to move German troops and supplies through Finland to northern Norway. Germany agrees to start to sell arms to Finland.

18 August
Acting President Risto Ryti instructs Mannerheim to verbally accept the German proposal of troop transport.

30 August
Germany give Romania guarantees for the nation's safety and agree the deployment of the Wehrmacht.

6 September
Finland signs an agreement allowing Soviet passage to the leased military base at Hanko.

12 September
Finland agrees to allow passage to German troops garrisoned in Norway.

26 September
Germany begins arms shipments to Finland.

27 September
Germany, Italy and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact.

7 October
German troops enter Romania to guard its oilfields against the Soviets. In order to deceive the USSR, German soldiers are deployed among the Romanian ranks as 'advisors'.

12 November
Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov begins his visit to Berlin. The Germans appear to dissuade the Soviets from an immediate invasion of Finland.

27 November
President Kyösti Kallio seeks permission to resign.

16–18 December
Halder and Göring meet with Major-General Paavo Talvela in Berlin.

18 December
Hitler approves the plans for Operation *Barbarossa*.

December
Hitler informs General Eduard Dietl of Operation *Silberfuchs (Silver Fox)*, a planned attack against Murmansk launched directly from Petsamo in Finland. The Finns have not yet been consulted.

19 December
Finnish President Kallio passes away.

19 December
Risto Ryti becomes President of Finland.

23 December
The Finland–Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society is disbanded by court order in Helsinki.

1941

3 January
The new Prime Minister of Finland, Johan Rangell, forms his cabinet.

30 January
General Erik Heinrichs meets General Halder in Berlin. The Finns refuse even to entertain talks about any hypothetical joint operations in the future.

3 March
The Soviets officially object to Germany having pressured Bulgaria to join the Axis powers.

4 March
British Operation *Claymore* landings against the German base at the Lofoten Islands.

7 March
Finland and Germany sign a trade agreement.

6 April
Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece.

21 April
The Finnish long-range reconnaissance patrols (LRRP) gain official status.

25 April
A Finnish military delegation led by General Heinrichs travels to Germany and is told about the plans for Operation *Barbarossa*.

31 May
Finland asks Germany to guarantee its independence, the import of foodstuffs and the restoration of its 1939 borders.

3 June
Germany pledges to support Finland should it find itself embroiled in another war with the Soviets. Finnish-German military negotiations begin in Helsinki.

5 June
Mannerheim recalls Talvela to active duty.

6 June
The first 120 secretly recruited volunteers depart Finland for the Waffen-SS. At the end of June, recruitment for the 1,500-strong Finnish battalion of the SS-Division 'Wiking' begins officially.

7 June
The first German formations move to Finland from bases in Norway.

15 June
Hjalmar Siilasvuo's III Army Corps is mobilised under German command in northern Finland.

17 June
Finland declares general mobilisation in a context of extraordinary military manoeuvres.

21 June
The Finns are informed that Operation *Barbarossa* will begin the following day.

22 June
Operation *Barbarossa* begins. Unprovoked, the Soviets bomb Finnish fortifications and vessels around Hanko and Åland. Luftwaffe bombers attacking the USSR are allowed to use Finnish airfields on their return legs (taking off from Finnish soil is not sanctioned until 25 June). Mannerheim orders the garrisoning of the Åland Islands. The Finnish Navy is allowed to participate in laying mines in the Gulf of Finland, in cooperation with the Germans.

23 June
Hitler's speech about brothers-in-arms in Finland causes a political scandal. Molotov demands an explanation from the Finnish government regarding its position towards Germany. The Soviet Union evacuates its embassy in Helsinki.

24 June
The Wehrmacht issues orders to Finnish troops under its command in the north of Finland not to cross national borders.

25 June
The Soviet Union bombs civilian and industrial targets in Finnish territory. Soviet artillery also fires on Finnish troop positions. The Finnish Air Force and anti-aircraft forces destroy 27 enemy planes. Prime Minister Rangell informs the Finnish parliament that Finnish neutrality has been violated and that Finland finds itself in a state of war. The Continuation War begins.

28 June
The Finnish military is given permission to cross the national border for reconnaissance and to occupy empty sectors of no man's land.

29 June
Operation *Platinfuchs* (*Platinum Fox*) begins. German forces attack Soviet positions from Lapland and Norway.

30 June
Major-General Talvela is given the critical command of VI Army Corps.

1 July
The German attack towards Murmansk (Operation *Platinfuchs*) grinds to a halt at the Soviet line at Litsajoki. Operation *Polarfuchs* (*Arctic Fox*) sees an attack launched towards Salla. The Finnish 6th Division (attached to the Wehrmacht) begins its own attack as part of the overall plan. Siilasvuo's III Army Corps, under the command of Army Command Norway (AOK Norwegen), begins its attack.

3 July
Siilasvuo's troops capture the village of Vuokkiniemi.

4 July
The 14th Division, led by Colonel Raappana, is ordered over the Soviet border. These are the first troops under Finnish command to invade the USSR since the Kinship Wars.

7 July
The village of Vuonninen is captured by Siilasvuo's III Army Corps. Task Force J proceeds forward to Kiestinki. Salla is captured as planned in Operation *Polarfuchs* with the help of the Finnish 6th Division.

8 July
Group O begins its advance; its troops are eventually halted by the strength of the enemy at Ristisalmi. Raappana's 14th Division captures the village of Repola and continues towards Omelia.

10 July
The Karelian Army begins its offensive with both the VI and VII Army Corps. Mannerheim makes the so-called Sword Scabbard Declaration.

11 July
Heiskanen's 11th Division liberates the town of Värtsilä. Task Force J reaches the Soviet defences at the Sohjana narrows, where the 242nd Rifle Regiment keeps it at bay.

12 July
Great Britain and the Soviet Union sign the Anglo-Soviet Agreement. Finnish troops under the command of Colonel Ruben Lagus reach Lake Tolvajärvi. The Finnish 14th Infantry Regiment is sent from Åland to reinforce Operation *Platinfuchs*.

14 July
Lieutenant-Colonel Väinö Merikallio leads the capture of Loimola village.

15 July
Colonel Antero Svensson's 7th Division reaches the Soviet positions along the Matkaselkä railway. The 1st Jäger Brigade reaches Koirinoja on Lake Ladoga.

17 July
The 1st Jäger Brigade destroys a strong enemy column marching to reinforce Loimola village. Troops from Woldemar Hägglund's VII Army Corps meet with those of the 11th Division at the Jänisjoki River.

18–22 July
Task Force Järvinen (VI Army Corps) secures the Lake Tulemajärvi area and then marches south, capturing the village of Suurmäki.

19 July
Mannerheim orders the Karelian Army to halt its attack on the Vitele–Vieljärvi line until further notice. Lagus' forces capture Salmi after two days of fierce fighting.

22 July
Colonel Lagus and Major-General Talvela are made Knights of the Mannerheim Cross (Talvela's cross is officially awarded 3 August). Lieutenant-Colonel Järvinen's troops capture the village of Suurmäki.

23 July
Talvela's VI Army Corps cross the former national border. The *Stavka Glavnogo Komandovaniya* – the Central Command of the Armed Forces of the USSR – is formed.

24 July
Talvela's VI Army Corps captures the village of Vitele and proceeds to take positions along the Tuulosjoki River, halting their attack without crossing, as dictated by Mannerheim. In the north, the 14th Division captures the town of Omelia. Soviet troops are forced to retreat from the Ruskeala area.

29 July
The German 163rd Division push for Suojärvi is unsuccessful.

30 July
The Royal Air Force bombs Liinahamari harbour in Petsamo. British diplomats call this either a 'tragic accident' or 'justified action against Germans, where Finland happened to be in the way'. It remains the only act of war between the two nations during the conflict.

31 July
Task Force J is reinforced by the Germans, and continues across the Sohjana River.

1 August
The Soviet counter-offensive in the Sortavala area fails, and the 168th and 198th Rifle divisions are forced to retreat. Mannerheim orders II Army Corps to begin its attack.

3 August
The battle for Kirvu; the extraordinary actions of Anti-Tank Gunner Vilho Rättö earn him the Mannerheim Cross.

5 August
The strategically important point village of Ilmee in Karelia is cleared by 18th Division.

7 August
Colonel Aarne Blick's 2nd Division from II Army Corps, reaches Lahdenpohja. Large Soviet formations are now left in the Sortavala area between the II and VII Army Corps. By 14 August they have been destroyed.

8 August
Task Force J captures the town of Kiestinki.

The German attack in the north of Finland towards Aittojoki is halted.

11 August
II Army Corps captures Hiitola village.

13 August
I Army Corps is formed.

14 August
The United States and Great Britain issue the Atlantic Charter, defining post-war Allied goals. Soviet forces in Karelia are forced back over the Antrea River. Task Force J is reinforced into Division J under Colonel Väinö Palojärvi.

15 August
Sortavala falls to the Finns. The Soviet 88th Rifle Division's Major-General Andrew Zelentsov and his headquarters staff are wiped out in a Luftwaffe raid.

15–17 August
The Soviet 265th Rifle Division is destroyed at Räisälä.

17 August
On the Karelian Isthmus, forward elements of the Finnish 18th Division establish a bridgehead over the Vuoksi River at Hopeasalmi.

17–19 August
A large proportion of the 168th Rifle Division manages to break out of the Rautalahti *motti* and escape over Lake Ladoga, but much equipment is left behind.

18 August
The United States informs Finland that the Soviet Union is ready for peace talks.

19 August
Group O and the 11th Division launch a joint operation to capture Suojärvi. The German XXXVI Army Corps reorganises for a new attack, and finally forces a Soviet retreat from the Kairala area of Lapland.

20 August
Formation of the Kiestinki *motti* resulting in the entrapment of parts of the Finnish Division J. These men are not liberated before early September, after having suffered 1,683 casualties. Soviet troops in Viipuri leave their defensive positions and quietly withdraw south.

21 August
IV Army Corps receives permission to conduct aggressive reconnaissance on the Viipuri front; this turns into an all-out assault. All Finnish land forces are now committed in the war. The 10th Division liberates the town of Käkisalmi. The Suojärvi area and the village of Suvilahti are captured by the Finns. The towns of Enso and Jääski are liberated.

23 August
Finnish forces capture the Kilpola archipelago, although not before significant elements of the 142nd and 198th Rifle divisions have escaped by boat. Tsalkki village is captured. The Finns reach Taipale on the Karelian Isthmus.

24 August
Konevitsa Monastery Island is liberated. The 115th and 123rd Rifle divisions start their counter-attack aiming to drive the Finns back into the Vuoksi River. Ryti and Mannerheim agree that Finland should not, despite German suggestions, participate in the invasion of Leningrad. The Finnish 8th Division crosses Viipuri Bay and cuts off the Soviet route of retreat to the south.

25 August
The capture of the railway station at Kämärä severs the Leningrad–Viipuri tracks acting as Soviet supply routes for large parts of the Karelian Isthmus. Group O reaches Onkamus and secures the bridge over the Suununjoki River. The 11th Division is ordered to swing eastwards towards Prääsä village, and to cut off and create a large motti to contain the Soviet troops. Colonel Matti Tiiainen, the commander of Light Brigade T, is killed by a Soviet barrage.

26 August
Finnish forces capture the narrows between the two largest lakes on the Karelian Isthmus.

27 August
The Finnish 12th Division captures Huumola.

27–29 August
The 'Russian Dunkirk': 190 ships of the Baltic Fleet attempt to evacuate Tallinn before the Wehrmacht reaches the city. At least 12,000 men drown.

28 August
The 4th Division occupies Säinö village, thus surrounding the Soviet troops on the western isthmus completely.
German troops liberate Tallinn.
The Soviets launch a counter-attack against the German XXXVI Army Corps causing them to dig in. The German attempt to cut the Murmansk railway fails. Plans for the Soviet 198th Rifle Division's counter-offensive in the Sortavala area fall into Finnish hands. Finland severs diplomatic relations with Great Britain.

29 August
Finnish forces liberate Viipuri.

31 August
Finnish troops reach the former national border on the Karelian Isthmus. The German XXXVI Army Corps crosses the Tuntsajoki River.

1 September
Finnish forces destroy the Porlammi *mott*i, and capture the largest cache of Soviet equipment of the entire war. The village of Säämäjärvi falls to the Finns, as they push past the large Karelian lakes.

2 September
Koivisto harbour is captured by Finnish troops, thus threatening the Soviet enclaves on the surrounding islands.

4 September
The Karelian Army starts its offensive from Tuulos towards Syväri. Soviet forces conduct a rapid counter-attack from Kiestinki.

5 September
The Finnish 11th Division captures Kinnas village and the important bridge over the Säpsäjoki River. Lagus' Jäger break the Soviet defence at the Aunus River. The city of Aunus falls shortly afterwards.

6 September
Raappana's 14th Division reaches Rukajärvi. Nurmoila falls; Soviet troops are forced out of the village.

7 September
The Syväri River is crossed by the 1st Jäger Brigade. The Soviet 3rd Rifle Division narrowly escapes from a *motti* near Lake Kalajärvi, but is forced to abandon all its heavy equipment.

8 September
Finnish forces capture Prääsä village.

9 September
Mannerheim orders the advance to stop just outside of the defensive lines around Leningrad.

11 September
Mannerheim expands the Karelian Army by granting it use of the 4th Division and the German 163rd Infantry Division, in preparation for the push to Petroskoi.

13 September
Talvela's men capture the railway bridge across Syväri. The Finnish 7th Division captures the Lumatjärvi crossroads. The joint German–Finnish naval Operation *Nordwind* begins; Finnish vessels set sail from Utö. The Finnish Navy's flagship, *Ilmarinen*, hits a mine and sinks, taking with it two-thirds of its crew.

14 September
The battle for Villavaara ends in a Finnish victory.

15 September
The Finnish 1st Division under Colonel Paavo Paalu captures Pyhäjärvi.

17 September
The German XXXVI Army Corps reaches the Vilmajoki River and takes up defensive positions. Mannerheim orders Raappana to stop at the Ontajoki River, to allow the formation of a unified front with the Karelian Army.

19 September
Colonel Kaarlo Viljanen's 4th Division captures the crossroads at Markkila.

22 September
The Karelian Army reaches the objective line agreed upon with the Germans prior to the campaign.

23 September
The 1st Jäger Brigade captures Petäjäselkä village, permanently severing Petroskoi from the south.

24 September
Stavka replaces Seventh Army commander Philip Gorolenko with General Cyril Meretskov.

30 September
The battle for Moscow begins.

End of September
Hitler orders the attacks towards Murmansk and the railway to stop. However, Nikolaus von Falkenhorst and Siilasvuo decide to make another attempt to reach Louhi town before the end of 1941.

1 October
The Karelian Army takes Petroskoi. The city is renamed Äänislinna.

2 October
Finnish forces push past Petroskoi to secure the region. They cross the narrows of the Suojunjoki River, and reach the bridge at Besovets. They also take Koskenkyä village.

3 October
Hitler gives a radio speech announcing that the Soviet Union has once and for all been defeated, and that it will never rise again.

6 October
Finnish troops initially refuse to cross the Syvärinniska River.

7 October
The Finnish 7th Division crosses the Syvärinniska tributary on the eastern edge, by Lake Ääninen. Munjärvi village is captured by Colonel Oinonen's Group O.

14 October
Parts of the 7th Division head east, cross the river Syvärinniska and meet the vanguard of the Soviet 114th Rifle Division, freshly transferred from Siberia. This meeting defines the front line for the remaining years of the war.

19 October
Group O reaches its objectives in northern Karelia, secures the Munjärvi area and defeats the Soviet 71st Rifle Division.

26 October
The Finnish 8th Division connects with Raappana's 14th Division and forms a unified front. They settle into trench positions.

27 October
The coastal defences in the Petroskoi area are secured and handed over to the newly formed Äänisjärvi Coastal Brigade.

1 November
Siilasvuo's III Army Corps attacks again towards Louhi and the Murmansk railway.

5 November
President Ryti informs Mannerheim that discharging parts of the army to return to civilian duty is vital for the infrastructure of the country.

6 November
Mannerheim starts to plan a third line of defence between lakes Seesjärvi and Ääninen. He also orders the formation of II Army Corps under Major-General Taavetti Laatikainen.

17 November
Siilasvuo gives orders to halt III Army Corps' attack on Louhi. The Murmansk railway is not reached.

17 November
Group O enters the deserted village of Perälahti without a fight.

23 November
The 8th Division of II Army Corps captures Karjalan Maaselkä by Lake Seesjärvi.

25 November
Finland joins the Anti-Comintern Pact.

28 November
Mannerheim proposes the first discharge of parts of the army.

30 November
The German offensive halts at the gates of Moscow.

2 December
The Soviets abandon the Hanko naval base under the cover of darkness.

5 December
Finnish forces take the town of Karhumäki.

6 December
Poventsa village comes under Finnish control. This is as far as Mannerheim allows the front to be extended.
The Finns declare that territories lost in the Moscow Peace Treaty have now returned to Finland. Great Britain declares war on Finland.

7 December
Mannerheim orders the Karelian Army to take up defensive positions on the fronts on the Maaselkä Isthmus (along lakes Ääninen and Seesjärvi) and Aunus Isthmus (along the Syväri River). A prolonged period of trench warfare starts.

8 December
The United States and Great Britain declare war on Japan.
In a belated attempt to prevent further Finnish advances, the Soviets blow up the locks of the Stalin Canal, flooding the town of Poventsa.

1942

1 January
The Soviet Navy attacks Finnish islands. The Red Army attacks towards Krivi on the Maaselkä Isthmus.

5 January
President Ryti receives news of Soviet peace terms, presented to the British foreign minister by Stalin.

14 January
Formation of the mostly German Army Command Lapland (AOK Lappland), and relief of the Finnish troops under Army Command Norway. Finnish Major Arnold Majewki leads an attack to sabotage the Murmansk railway at Maiguba.

19 January
Majewski's sabotage mission destroys a section of railway, and the troops make their return to Finnish territory.

21 January
Mannerheim warns Ryti of a possible German collapse on the Eastern Front. Japan invades Burma. The Soviet Navy manages to capture the station at Krivi.

3 February
Mannerheim informs Germany that, unless its position on the Eastern Front improves, he will abandon the attack on the Murmansk railway.

7 February
The Soviets are ejected from Krivi by Laatikainen's II Army Corps. A surprise attack by Soviet ski-troops attempts to take the town of Poventsa, but is repelled after a week.

10 February
Finnish headquarters upgrades the Tank Battalion to an armoured brigade. In June the unit is combined with the 1st Jäger Brigade to form the Armoured Division.

27–28 March
Finnish forces perform a daring crossing of the frozen Gulf of Finland to capture Suursaari Island from the Soviets.

28–29 March
The Royal Air Force bombs Cologne (Köln).

30 March
The Finnish Army occupies Tytärsaari Island. The Germans agree to garrison it.

5 April
Hitler orders a shift in focus on the Eastern Front towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus.

8 April
A Soviet attack on the garrison on Tytärsaari is repelled.

9 April
US troops surrender on Bataan in the Philippines.

10 April
Finnish troops depart Tytärsaari, and the German garrison takes over.

11 April
The Soviet attack on the Syväri River marks the beginning of the rasputitsa battles.

21 April
Finnish forces recapture the Syväri River breach during the *rasputitsa* battles.

24 April
Soviet forces attack from Kiestinki.

7 May
The Soviet encirclement at Kiestinki is contained by the Finns.

8 May
German troops begin an offensive in the Crimea.

12 May
The Soviet Union begins a spring offensive south towards Kharkov.

22 May
The Finnish and German navies begin building a mine blockade, forcing the Soviet Navy into a small corner of the Gulf of Finland.

24 May
The second phase of the *rasputitsa* battles, at Kiestinki, ends after a month of fierce fighting with a defensive victory for III Army Corps.

26 May
Great Britain and the Soviet Union sign the Anglo-Soviet Treaty. A German–Italian force attacks towards El Alamein on the Egyptian border.

30–31 May
The Royal Air Force launches a major raid on Cologne.

3 June
German troops attack Sevastopol in the Crimea.

4 June
Hitler visits Finland on Mannerheim’s 75th birthday.

27 June
Mannerheim departs for a visit to Germany.

28 June
German forces launch a broad attack on the Don front.

1 July
The German XVIII Mountain Corps relieves Finnish forces on the Lapland front. The 3rd Division takes responsibility for the area south of Uhtua. German troops take Sevastopol in the Crimea.

23 July
Hitler orders preparations for the taking of Leningrad.

27 July
The Germans take Rostov at the mouth of the Don River.

29 July
Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler visits Finland.

30 July
Stalin issues Order No. 227: ‘Not a step back.’

2 August
Mannerheim agrees to participate in the attack on Sorokka (Belomorsk), provided that German forces take Leningrad by September.

23 August
The German vanguard advances to Stalingrad.

13 September
The German attack at Stalingrad begins.

9 October
Hitler permanently abandons plans to capture Leningrad.

22 October
In Stockholm, junior diplomatic official (and NKVD secret agent) Boris Yartsev hints at the possibility of peace between Finland and the Soviet Union.

3 November
The Cabinet of Finland forbids the mass deportation of Jewish refugees.

16 December
Soviet troops break through Italian lines on the Don front.

22 December
Soviet forces attack in the Caucasus.

1943

2 January
German forces begin their retreat from the Caucasus.

31 January
Commander of Sixth Army Friedrich Paulus is captured at Stalingrad.

1 February
The Finnish Air Force agrees a deal with Germany for the delivery of 30 modern Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 fighters.

2 February
Axis forces surrender at Stalingrad.

21 February
German forces counter-attack at Kharkov.

4 March
Mannerheim informs Germany that he will cease offensive operations.

13 March
Hitler prioritises the offensive on the Kursk front. The troops expected to be freed up after this are to be redeployed as part of Operation *Parkplatz*, the capture of Leningrad.

15 March
German forces retake Kharkov.

20 March
The United States offers Finland its services in opening up dialogue with the Soviet Union.

26 March
Ribbentrop chides Finland for its intentions of peace.

17 April
Lieutenant-General Talvela requests that Mannerheim let him return from Germany to a front-line command. *'Om det blir krig'* ('If the war starts'), promises Mannerheim.

23 April
The American chargé d'affaires receives instructions on severing diplomatic ties with Finland.

25 April
The United States cancels the breaking of diplomatic ties.

12 May
Axis forces in North Africa surrender.

22 May
The Soviet Union dissolves the Comintern.

1 June
The Finnish Volunteer Battalion of the Waffen-SS returns to Hanko for a period of leave.

2 June
The Western Allies inform the Soviet Union that the invasion of Europe will be postponed until spring 1944.

27 June
Mannerheim informs Hitler that Finland needs the men of the Finnish Volunteer Battalion of the Waffen-SS for itself and that these troops will not return to Germany.

10 July
The Allies land in Sicily.

11 July
The Finnish Volunteer Battalion of the Waffen-SS is disbanded.

30 July
The Soviet Union enquires about the Finnish view on peace terms.

3 August
The Finns decide to respond to Soviet peace enquiries.

11 August
The Soviet Union rejects Finnish peace proposals.

13 October
Italy declares war on Germany.

14–15 October
General Jodl visits Finland and informs Mannerheim of Germany's military situation.

6 November
Soviet troops take Kiev.

18 November
Mannerheim orders the construction of the Viipuri–Kuparsaari–Taipale (VKT) Line on the Karelian Isthmus, and the U Line north of Ladoga.

20 November
The Soviet ambassador to Sweden, Alexandra Kollontai, proclaims that Finland will not be required to surrender unconditionally.

26 November
Ribbentrop enquires about the possibility of a political union between Finland and Germany.

29 November
The Finns inform Kollontai that they are ready to negotiate based on the borders of 1939.

28 November–1 December
Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt discuss strategy at the Tehran Conference.

1 December
In Tehran, Stalin states his terms for peace in Finland.

29 December
Finland rejects the political union proposed by Germany.

1944

14–27 January
The Soviet offensive to relieve Leningrad takes place.

30 January
The US recommends that Finland remove itself from the war.

1 February
Mannerheim orders the Finnish Armoured Division to become part of his personal reserves north of Viipuri.

6–7 February
Following the British example set at Cologne, Stalin uses terror bombing over Helsinki to force Finland to capitulate. The first raid is carried out by nearly 800 bombers. The massed bombing raids are repeated, by 400 planes on 16/17 February and again by 920 planes on 26/27 February. Other Finnish population centres also receive their share of the bombers' attention in this period.

7 February
Mannerheim orders Aaro Pajari's 3rd Division to transfer from Uhtua to the Vammelsuu–Vuotas area to prepare for action against the Soviets.

14 February
The German forces retreat, and the siege of Leningrad is lifted. This enables Soviet commanders to amass forces on the Finnish front.

3 March
Mannerheim gives a critical directive requesting that care be taken when preparing defences across the Karelian Isthmus.

4 March
Mannerheim reorganises the command structure on the Karelian Isthmus.

29 March
Siilasvuo expresses concerns that the Vammelsuu–Taipale (VT) Line is nowhere near finished or defendable.

22 April
Finnish efforts to reach a peaceful settlement with the Soviet Union cease.

10 May
Mannerheim again expresses concern about the unfinished state of the defences, and tells the troops that he wants them to hold firm in face of the overwhelming attack that will follow.

6 June
The Allied invasion of Normandy takes place.

9 June
The Leningrad Front's offensive against Finland begins with a massive artillery bombardment on the Karelian Isthmus.

10 June
The defences at Valkeasaari are overrun by Soviet forces. Major-General Johannes Sihvo's 10th Division flees the front.

11 June
General orders are issued that all Finnish troops should fall back to the Vammelsuu–Taipale (VT) Line. Finnish troops on leave are recalled, being given until 20 June to return to the front line.

12–16 June
Major-General Ilmari Martola's 2nd Division holds the Soviets at the battle of Siiranmäki for four days before the enemy withdraws.

14 June
The Soviet 72nd and 286th Rifle divisions break through at Kuuterselkä, compromising this section of the VT Line. The Soviet 1st Tank Brigade continues past the Finnish positions at the VT Line, capturing the area by the Cavalry Brigade's headquarters. Mannerheim orders the creation of a new Karelian Isthmus command centre under Lieutenant-General Karl L. Oesch. Major-General Talvela takes command of Aunus Group.

15 June
Soviet tanks have reached the rear of Major-General Lars Melander's Cavalry Brigade at Vammeljärvi. Its consequent retreat will force the Finns to abandon the VT Line. Colonel Albert Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade's counter-attack towards Kuuterselkä fails. After heavy fighting these men are sent to recover in the rear. The VT Line is deemed unrecoverable. Lieutenant-General Oesch receives Mannerheim's orders for all troops to withdraw from the VKT Line. Colonel Olli Paloheimo's Military Government of Ladoga Karelia and Aunus begins civilian evacuations in the area.

16 June
Siilasvuo's III Army Corps abandons the southern side of the Vuoksi River. The 2nd Jäger Battalion manages to capture Perkjärvi village from the Soviets, but loses 90 per cent of its officers in the process.

17 June
Aunus Group and II Army Corps are given permission to begin a fighting withdrawal towards the U Line and the former border.

19 June
Finnish troops from Aunus Group withdraw from bridgehead positions south of the Syväri River.

18 June
Major-General Lagus assumes overall command of the 10th Division and the Cavalry Brigade. He organises the defence of the Rokkalanjoki area. Leonard Govorov is promoted to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union.

19 June
Mannerheim's daily orders demand that the VKT Line must hold. The new commander of the Cavalry Brigade, Colonel Urho Tähtinen, is ordered to repel any attacks on the western coast of Viipuri. The Soviets attack the PSS Line in eastern Karelia, and the Finns abandon their bridgehead on the south side of the Syväri River.

20 June
Mannerheim splits the defence of the VKT Line between the IV and III Army Corps. The V Army Corps takes up position west of Viipuri, which is captured by Soviet forces in a single day. The Soviets break through on the Maaselkä Isthmus, and force the Finns back to the Karhumäki–Seesjärvi line. The Finns enquire as to the possibility of peace with the Soviets. The Soviets will only agree to complete and unconditional surrender, something the Finns cannot accept. Major-General Ivan Fadeyev orders the Soviet 6th Rifle Corps to attack through Näätälä and past Lake Kokkoselkä to Noskua. The attack is repelled, and Fadeyev repeats the attack the next day, which also fails. These struggles will continue for a further week.

21 June–6 July
The battle of Tali–Ihantala – the largest ever fought in the Nordic countries – begins with attacks by Twenty-First Army. Two weeks of the fiercest combat result in a decisive defensive victory for the Finns. The Soviet 98th Rifle Corps reaches positions in front of Äyräpää and Kyläpaakkola on the Vuoksi River. Two weeks of failed attempts to cross the river follow.

21–24 June
Soviet forces cross the Syväri while Finnish troops conduct an orderly fighting retreat as planned.

22 June
German foreign minister Ribbentrop makes a surprise visit to Helsinki. He talks to President Ryti about the possibility of more German aid if Finland allies itself firmly to Germany. On the Tali front, the Finnish 18th Division's strongpoint in front of Mannikkala is destroyed, and the Soviets steamroller through the VKT Line towards Tali and Repola. Soviet Operation *Bagration* begins on the third anniversary of Hitler's *Barbarossa*.

23 June
The town of Karhumäki on the Maaselkä Isthmus is lost. II Army Corps continues its orderly retreat. Coastal defence troops are forced to retreat from the Koivisto Islands. The Soviet 70th Naval Rifle Brigade makes a surprise landing behind the PSS Line, near the villages of Vitele and Tuulos. Finnish counter-attacks fail, and the PSS Line starts to fold.

23 June
Colonel-General Eduard Dietl dies in a plane crash.

24 June
Major-General Blick disregards direct orders to hold the PSS Line and instead gives orders for his VI Army Corps to retreat. This forces the rest of Aunus Group to withdraw in haste to avoid being surrounded.

25 June
The second concerted attempt by the Soviet Twenty-First Army to break through in IV Army Corps' sector at Tali–Ihantala begins. This creates a serious breach in the Finnish lines at Portinhoikka.

26 June
The reinforced 1st Jäger Brigade launches a successful night counter-attack on the Tali–Repola front. Despite destroying 45 enemy tanks, the Finnish light tanks suffer heavy losses.

27 June
The Ryti–Ribbentrop Agreement: President Ryti sends his personal guarantee to Hitler that Finland will not enter into any form of peace agreement with the USSR in return for immediate German aid. On the Syväri Isthmus, VI Army Corps is given orders to retreat north of the Soviet landing to their rear. Major-General Heiskanen and the 11th Division arrives from eastern Karelia, and takes over the defence of Kärstilänjärvi–Leitimojärvi, thus freeing Lagus' Armoured Division to manoeuvre and attack.

27–29 June
The IV Army Corps attempts to surround the Soviet 63rd and 64th Guards Rifle divisions at Tali–Ihantala. When this action fails, Laatikainen again moves to the defence. By now the Twenty-First Army commander, Colonel-General Dmitry Gusev, has realised that his gambit has not worked. Despite this, the fighting continues for another week.

28 June
Fighter ace Hans Wind is engaged by enemy planes and badly wounded. He survives and makes it back home. In the wake of the battle of Noskua, the Soviet 6th Rifle Corps is totally spent, and moves to the defensive. The Finns abandon the city of Äänislinna in eastern Karelia. It will soon revert to being known as Petroskoi.

29 June
The IV Army Corps fails to surround the Soviet Guards units, and retreats to the north of their battleground. Commander of the Leningrad Front Govorov concludes that the Twenty-First Army is unable to create the breach he needs, and so orders the Fifty-Ninth Army under Lieutenant-Colonel Ivan Korovnikov to cross Viipuri Bay and for Alexander I. Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army to cross the Vuoksi River at Äyräpää.

29 June–6 July
Finnish artillery proves instrumental in halting the last efforts of the Soviets in the Tali–Ihantala area, shelling Soviet troops repeatedly at their jumping-off points. Over the previous weeks, both sides have accumulated a total of over 35,000 casualties.

30 June
Korovnikov's newly arrived Fifty-Ninth Army attempts a final landing across Viipuri Bay for the first time, but is repelled. Mannerheim brings II Corps under the control of Talvela's Aunus Group and orders a fighting withdrawal to the U Line.

1 July
Stavka starts to transfer surplus units from the front line in Karelia to the Eastern Front.

3–10 July
A major Soviet attack is launched by the Fifty-Ninth Army in Viipuri Bay, but it fails to create the intended bridgehead on the coast of Finland.

3 July
Lieutenant-General Basil I. Shvetsov replaces Tsherepanov as the Twenty-Third Army commander in the central Karelian Isthmus. Soviet forces capture Minsk and take around 100,000 German prisoners.

4–9 July
The 98th Rifle Corps attacks at Äyräpää–Vuosalmi. The Finns are driven across the Vuoksi River to Vuosalmi, but in the process the attacking corps is practically destroyed.

4–6 July
The Finnish Navy supports Finnish forces in Viipuri Bay. The following day, Soviet forces claim the islands around Viipuri.

5 July
The Lintujärvi–Jänkäjärvi line is reached by the Soviets. Aunus Group continues to fall back, exposing II Army Corps' right flank and thus also forcing its retreat.

6 July
Four powerful Soviet corps roll forward, capturing Salmi village and crossing the Tulemajoki River in Ladoga Karelia.

7 July
Talvela gives the orders to withdraw to the U Line, the last line of defence in Ladoga Karelia. The last Finnish rearguards do so by 10 July. Due to disobeying orders and retreating, Major-General Blick is relieved from VI Army Corps command and sent to lead the 2nd Division on the Karelian Isthmus. He is replaced by Major-General Martola.

9–17 July
The newly arrived 115th Rifle Corps continues the attack by the 98th Rifle Corps around Vuosalmi. In the end both sides suffer tremendous losses, but the VKT Line still remains under III Army Corps control.

9 July
Soviet forces attempt to cross the Tervajoki River at Viipuri Bay, but are halted by the German 122nd Infantry Division. The Soviet Fifty-Ninth Army moves to the defensive. Finland remobilises older men that have been discharged from service.

11 July
Soviet forces launch a major attack in the Nietjärvi sector. The U Line holds.

13 July
The Soviets take Porajärvi from Colonel Torvald Ekman's 21st Brigade.

15–17 July
Soviet forces attempt a second breakthrough in the Nietjärvi sector. The U Line still holds.

17–23 July
The battle of Loimola village, involving the newly arrived Soviet 127th Light Rifle Corps on the northern edge of the U Line. Both sides end up entrenched.

17 July
The frequency of Soviet attacks on Finnish positions dwindles. The VKT Line has been shifted, but holds. Both sides adopt trench warfare.

18 July
Aunus Group is disbanded, the front having been stabilised around the U Line ten days previously. Mannerheim again sends Talvela as his envoy to German headquarters. In Ladoga Karelia, VI Army Corps assumes overall responsibility for the defences. The Red Army enters Poland.

25 July–4 August
A Soviet attack forces Major-General Frans U. Fagernäs' 1st Division to retreat from Suojärvi to Tolvajärvi, digging into defensive positions at the lake narrows.

26 July
Aiming for the town of Ilomantsi, the 289th Rifle Division captures the important Kuolismaa village crossroads, while the vanguard of the 176th Rifle Division on their right flank edges past the former border.

27 July
Alexandra Kollontai tells the Swedish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Erik Boheman that the Soviet Union is ready to talk peace, on condition that Finland changes its government.

29 July
German forces are recalled from the Karelian Isthmus to protect the front lines threatening Germany.

1 August
President Ryti resigns. Prime Minister Edwin Linkomies acts as president.

2 August
The Soviet 176th and 289th Rifle divisions are encircled in a loose *motti* by Raappana's Group R. The Karelian Front sends two naval rifle brigades to relieve their comrades.

4 August
Soviet forces in the Tolvajärvi area cease all attacks, and the front stabilises for the remainder of the war. Mannerheim is sworn in as Finland's president.

5 August
Major-General Einar Vihma is killed by a Soviet mortar barrage at Ihantala.

9 August
On the Ilomantsi front, Major-General Raappana inflicts heavy losses on the Soviet divisions trapped in the *motti*. Both sides entrench.

17 August
Field Marshal Keitel, Chief of the German Armed Forces, visits Finland. Mannerheim bluntly informs him that Finland will only keep fighting alongside Germany as long as it is in its own best interest to do so.

25 August
The Finnish ambassador to Sweden, Georg Gripenberg, hands Kollontai a letter containing Finland's proposal for an armistice.

29 August
The USSR answers Finland's proposal for peace with its own harsh terms.

2 September
The Finnish parliament accepts a draft peace agreement and terms of armistice with the Soviet Union. Finland breaks relations with Germany and, as demanded, declares that all German troops must leave its territory by 15 September.

3 September
Mannerheim sends what forces he can to the northern front in Lapland. These troops are not yet given orders to fight German troops, but are instructed to garrison the area in the wake of their withdrawal.

4 September
Finnish forces begin the ceasefire as agreed at 08:00. The German Twentieth Mountain Army receives orders to initiate Operation *Birke* (*Birch*).

5 September
After a further day of attacks, Soviet forces also join the ceasefire.

7 September
President Mannerheim orders the evacuation of civilians from the areas controlled by German forces. A Finnish delegation leaves for Moscow in order to negotiate the final peace agreement. The delegation is led by Prime Minister Antti Hackzell, but after he falls ill, Foreign Minister Carl Enckell takes charge.

11 September
Lieutenant-Colonel Usko Haahti flies to Rovaniemi in order to agree on the terms of the planned 'Phoney War' with the Germans.

14 September
Negotiations start for a final peace agreement; the Soviet Union unveils its new, even harsher demands. German forces leave southern Finland. The 'Autumn Manoeuvres' or 'Phoney War' commences in Lapland.

15 September
The Lapland War begins. The deadline set by the Soviets to drive out the Germans expires. The German Navy attempts a landing against the Finns at Suursaari Island, and suffers a humiliating defeat. The Finns are able to showcase a point of actual warfare, fulfilling the armistice terms.

18 September
Molotov gives Finland one day to consider and sign the peace agreement. Following the German attack at Suursaari, Haahti returns to Rovaniemi to reaffirm the terms for the Phoney War, including the timetable for the German withdrawal.

19 September
The Finnish parliament accepts the terms of peace proposed by the Soviet Union. A temporary peace agreement is signed in Moscow. Puroma's 6th Division is ordered to push forwards towards Suomussalmi and Puolanka.

22 September
Mannerheim's daily orders concerning the end of the war against the Soviet Union are made public. Finnish troops led by Colonel Kustaa Inkala meet Soviet forces that have already crossed the border near Suomussalmi.

24 September
Major-General Lagus orders his forces to advance towards Kemi. Shortly after, Mannerheim installs Siilasvuo as overall commander of Finnish forces in Lapland, with headquarters at Oulu.

27 September
Siilasvuo officially takes charge, and moves to put an end to the Phoney War. He issues new orders to his forces.

28 September
The Porkkala Naval Area is 'leased' to the Soviets and handed over. The first firefight of the Lapland War takes place between the Finns and the Germans at Pudasjärvi.

30 September
Mannerheim receives threats from the Allied Control Commission that if Finland is unable to evict the German armies on its own, the Soviet Union will send troops to provide immediate support.

1–6 October
The Finns conduct a stealth landing, starting the battle of Tornio. Over the coming days the bridgehead is heavily reinforced and all German counter-attacks repelled. The loss of Tornio accelerates the withdrawal of the whole German Twentieth Mountain Army.

2 October
German forces are ordered to destroy all industrial and military property and infrastructure in Lapland.

5 October
Soviet members of the Allied Control Commission arrive in Finland. The German high command orders General Lothar Rendulic to withdraw all his troops to Norway and take up positions at the Lyngen Fjord.

7 October
Mannerheim approaches Sweden to help with the refugee problem in the north.

8 October
Finnish troops liberate the town of Kemi.

9 October
Churchill and Stalin meet in Moscow. Finland remains outside the Soviet sphere of influence. The defeated German 7th Mountain Division escapes from Group Lagus.

13 October
German forces in Lapland are ordered to destroy all civilian property and any possible shelter the Finns could use during the oncoming winter.

16 October
Finnish forces liberate the ruined town of Rovaniemi.

19 October
The Allied Control Commission presents the Finnish government with its first list of war criminals.

20 October
The Finnish Armoured Division occupies the ruined village of Sodankylä. The Soviet Union and Yugoslavian resistance forces capture Belgrade.

23 October
Finnish troops reach the German fortifications at Tankavaara, but fail to displace German forces there.

28 October
Bulgaria makes an armistice agreement with the Allies.

30 October
Minister Tanner forbids the handing of Jewish refugees to Germany. German troops withdraw from Muonio village.

31 October
The German high command orders the troops at Tankavaara to withdraw. Following pressure from the Soviets, a law is passed in Finland disbanding all Civil Guard organisations.

1 November
The disbanding of the Finnish wartime army begins. Peacetime formations are to be in place by 5 December.

7 November
Roosevelt is re-elected for his second term as President of the United States of America.

17 November
President Mannerheim appoints the second government of Prime Minister Juho K. Paasikivi.

20 November
Finnish forces reach the border at Utsjoki.

22 November
The Soviet Union returns the first prisoners of war.

23 November
Lotta Svärd, the women's paramilitary organisation, is disbanded.

5 December
Peacetime strength is reached in the Finnish armed forces; former soldiers have returned to civilian life. The Allied Control Commission approves Finland to take loans from the US government.

16–26 December
German forces launch the Ardennes offensive.

17 December
Agreement is reached on the amount of Finnish war reparations.

20 December
Mannerheim makes it clear to the Soviets in a letter that, going forward, Finland and the Soviet Union do not have common military goals.

27 December
Soviet forces surround Budapest.

1945

23 January
Soviet troops reach the Polish-German border.

13 February
Soviet forces conquer Budapest.

15 February
British forces reach the old France-German border on the Rhine.

3 March
The Finnish government belatedly notes that the country has been in a state of war with Germany since 15 September 1944.

17 April
President Mannerheim appoints the third government of Prime Minister Juho Paasikivi.

18 April
German resistance in the Ruhr collapses.

20 April
Minister of the Interior Yrjö Leino hands the persons on the list drawn up by the Allied Control Commission to the Soviets.

25 April
The final shots of the Lapland War are fired in Kilpisjärvi.

27 April
Siilasvuo informs Mannerheim that all German troops have been evicted from Finnish territory, and declares the Lapland War over.

30 April
Hitler commits suicide.

8 May
Nazi Germany surrenders.

6 August
The US drops a nuclear bomb on Hiroshima.

6 August
The Soviet Union acknowledges Finland diplomatically.

9 August
The US drops a nuclear bomb on Nagasaki.
The Soviet Union declares war on Japan.

10 August
Japan surrenders unconditionally.

18 August
The US recognises Finland diplomatically.

12 September
Mannerheim resigns for health reasons.

19 September
The Allied Control Commission receives recommendations that Karelia should be returned to Finnish control. The ceded lands remain in Russian hands to date.

8 October
The Soviet Union extends the deadline for Finland to pay its $300 million war reparations. The reparations will finally be repaid in full in September 1952.

15 November
The Finnish war crimes trials begin in Helsinki. Former president Risto Ryti is among those sentenced.

12 December
The US grants Finland its first national dollar loan.

1947

Parliamentary elections end the reign of terror by the Red VALPO (secret police).

28 January 1951
Marshal of Finland, Gustav Mannerheim, dies in Lausanne, Switzerland.

CHAPTER 1

THE RETURN TO WAR

THE INTERIM PEACE: 1940–41

The 1940 truce between the Soviet Union and Finland, which concluded the conflict known as the Winter War, came at a high price for Finland. Nearly 10 per cent of the country's total pre-war territory had to be relinquished and some 12 per cent of the population had to be evacuated from the ceded lands. According to the terms of the Moscow Peace Treaty, the Soviet Union gained control of the whole Karelian Isthmus including Finland's second biggest city, Viipuri. Two other major towns, Käkisalmi and Sortavala, were lost, along with the part of Karelia north of Lake Ladoga. Further north, the lands east of Suojärvi, Salla and Kuusamo were similarly forfeited. On the Barents Sea, Kalastajasaarento (the Rybachy Peninsula) now belonged to the Soviet Navy, which had also demanded the leasing of Hanko harbour on the southernmost tip of Finland. The

A captured T-34 *Sotka* tank paraded at Pihkalanjärvi. Although territory was lost, the repatriated armour remained. The large Finnish swastikas had been painted on the turret and forward armour to help identify their few own tanks. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

An aerial photograph of Hanko village taken a few days before the harbour was handed over to the Soviets as part of the Moscow Treaty. The village is located on the most southerly point of Finland. Gaining a foothold here considerably increased the Red Navy's influence on the Gulf of Finland. (SA-Kuva)

Soviet Navy's grip on the Gulf of Finland was further tightened when strategically important Suursaari and several other large islands were handed over.

The Soviets' victory had cost them dearly; even the most conservative estimates cite over 200,000 killed with post-war Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev claiming that the total fatalities resulting from the Winter War had exceeded one million men. The Finns buried 24,918 of their countrymen, while 9,562 of the total 43,557 wounded would remain permanently disabled.

The 420,000 refugees, mainly from Karelia, were granted only ten days by the Soviet Union to transfer themselves across the new borders. Moving this host would have been impossible without considerable help from Sweden. People simply had to grab what possessions and domestic animals they could, and leave their ancestral homes behind.

Once again the Finnish nation showed solidarity by providing for these displaced compatriots. Large swathes of privately owned lands were nationalised and redistributed to the refugees. The war, and the hugely unpopular truce, undoubtedly knitted the nation together more tightly. By now, the old hatchets of the Finnish Civil War had been well and truly buried, and veterans all over the country formed popular Brothers in Arms association. This did not sit well with Stalin, and already by May 1940 a countermovement entitled the Finnish–Soviet Union Peace and Friendship Society had been established. The secret goal of this organisation would be to wage a propaganda war and increase tensions, which could create political justification for armed intervention by the Soviet Union.

The Finnish executive in the meantime doubled the duration of national service from one to two years, and started to increase the military budget considerably. However, obtaining foreign weapons and support still proved challenging.

Finland found itself politically isolated after the Winter War. In order to ensure the country's neutrality in future conflicts, lobbyists doubled their efforts in creating a joint Nordic defensive union with Sweden, Norway and Denmark. This was an initiative the Finnish government had been keen to realise since before the war. Immediately after signing the armistice, the Finns again approached the embassies of all their neighbouring countries. The Soviet Union strongly objected to the creation of the defensive union, which it saw as a means of preparing for another conflict. At the end of March, after threatening each of the countries in turn, the Soviets made a declaration that any nation joining this defensive union would be considered to have adopted a foreign policy opposing the peace and the Soviet Union. This effectively squashed the opportunity to form a Nordic alliance.

The plight of Finland was soon overshadowed by the start of the German blitzkrieg: on 9 April 1940, Germany commenced its invasion of Denmark and Norway. This in turn stirred the Finnish Commander-in-Chief Mannerheim to criticise Soviet policy towards the Nordic countries. Had the proposed defensive union become reality, it would have most likely also benefitted the Red Army by deterring Hitler from his conquests. The lack of a credible defence force had inspired the Germans to capture bases along the Arctic Ocean, and to threaten the Soviet bases in Murmansk.

Sweden in turn approached Finland in May with ideas for a military alliance. Again, the Soviet Union torpedoed this move as incongruous with the terms of peace. Germany, in the meantime, was working hard to leave Finland politically isolated. By now Hitler had begun to form plans that had no place for a neutral Finland.

(1867–1951)

CARL GUSTAF EMIL MANNERHEIM

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

MARSHAL AND PRESIDENT OF FINLAND

Baron Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim was born on 4 June 1867. His military career started at the age of 14 upon admittance to Hamina Cadet School in Finland from where he was to rise to serve in Grand Duke Nicholas' 15th Alexandrian Cavalry Regiment and the Tsar's Chevalier Guard. Mannerheim served in the front lines during the Russo-Japan war in 1904–05, and again in World War I. In 1917, Lieutenant-General Mannerheim fell out of favour with the new revolutionary Russian government. He was relieved of duty that autumn, retired from service and returned home in 1918.

When Finland declared independence, the Senate appointed Mannerheim as the Chairman of the Military Committee and the Supreme Commander of the government's White Guards. He soon led them to victory in the Civil War, and serving briefly as a regent of the state, travelled widely in order to gain political support for his young country's independence.

Humanitarian pursuits occupied Mannerheim; he led the Finnish Red Cross from 1919 to 1951, sat on its international board, and founded the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare. He was the Bank of Helsinki's chairman until 1934, and was also a board member of Nokia Corporation. In 1931, Mannerheim was appointed to Finland's Defence Council, and in 1933 he received the rank of field marshal. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish Army in 1939, a position he then held throughout World War II. In 1942, he received the title Marshal of Finland. Mannerheim accepted the presidency in 1944 when President Ryti stepped down to enable Finland to seek a peace agreement to end the war.

To this day Mannerheim is revered as a national hero and as the saviour of Finland's independence. In 2004, 53 years after his death, a survey conducted in Finland named Mannerheim as the greatest Finn of all time. Such is the high regard in which this 'Father of Finland' is held.

As Hitler's troops now occupied Denmark and Norway, both Finland and Sweden were completely surrounded by territory either in German or Soviet hands. The Soviet Union sent an ultimatum to Romania demanding the cessation of its eastern parts of Bessarabia and northern Bukovina. On 27 June, after only a day's deliberation, the demands were met in full.

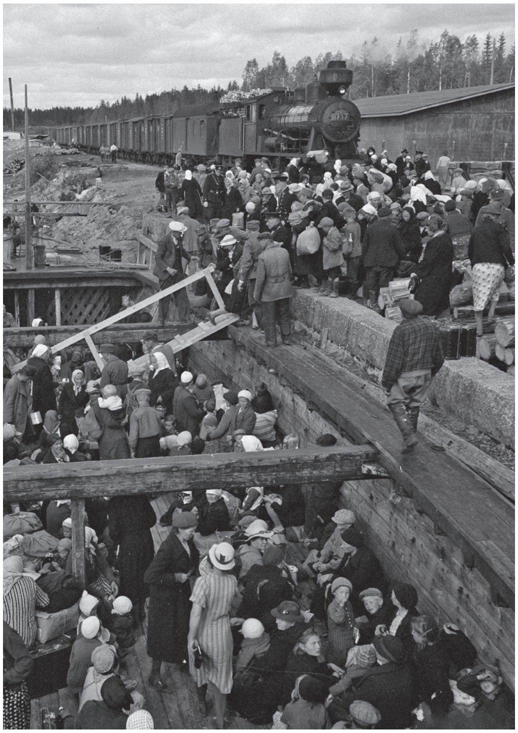
Even more worrying for the Finns was the fate of the Baltic states. To begin with, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were forced to grant the Soviets the use of several military bases. Once established, the Soviets used these bases as jumping-off points, and proceeded to occupy these three small states by 17 June. A month later each nation, seemingly of its own initiative, requested official annexation by the Soviet Union. These requests were fully met.

Even after all of their demands in the aftermath of the Winter War had been met, the Soviets kept pressuring the Finns for further concessions. In addition to assorted reparations, these demands comprised repairs to production facilities in the occupied territories and the handing over of the nickel mines in the Petsamo region. Not satisfied with mere monetary compensation, Stalin's minions now presented a long list of political and social demands, dictating for instance who should become the next president and listing those who should step down from their current positions.

The Red Army also committed other provocations; for instance, on 14 June 1940, a Finnish passenger plane, *Kaleva,* was shot down on its return trip from Estonia. The plane was clearly marked and was practically over

Finnish territorial waters for the duration of the whole flight. There were no survivors and no bodies were ever recovered. Post-war investigations have revealed that the Soviets seemed to be after the diplomatic mail that the plane was carrying. Eyewitness accounts described how their surface vessels tracked the falling plane and quickly recovered the sealed mail packages on board.

By the summer, Finland's fortunes were about to turn permanently. Hitler turned his gaze towards the East. Nobody in the German high command seemed especially concerned that they were now being ordered to plot the invasion of the USSR – a formal ally with whom, only a year previously, Hitler had planned to split control of Europe. The 22 July 1940 diary entry of the Chief of the Army High Command, Colonel-General Franz Halder, made it clear that the Germans now considered Finland a viable route of attack to the Soviet Union.



The Finns took great care and pride in relocating the hundreds of thousands of countrymen forced to flee the lands ceded to the Soviet Union in 1940. While many had to make the arduous journey by foot, all possible means of transport were utilised. This image shows the loading of barges at Vilppula in summer 1941. After a year of homelessness, many of these people would follow the advancing Finnish armies back to their ancestral lands in Karelia. (Sa-Kuva)

The most urgent part of the German plans was the transfer of troops from the West to the Eastern Front. After the Battle of Britain had been lost and the invasion of the British Isles deemed impossible, Hitler started to accelerate his plans for the second front. He seemed to have believed that the fall of the Soviet Union would also cause Great Britain to capitulate, rather than continue fighting alone.

The initial objectives for Operation *Barbarossa* were the conquests of Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic countries. The borders of Finland were to expand to the shores of the White Sea. At this stage of planning, no one in Finland had been consulted. Hitler wanted *Barbarossa* to be completed within five months and assigned 120 divisions for this task. The Germans took it for granted that both Romania and Finland would join them in the attack, and therefore implemented a complete reversal in their foreign policy during the summer of 1940. Without Finland, which had the longest border with the Soviet Union, *Barbarossa* would not be viable.

Romania's support was secured on 30 August when Hitler gave assurances that its sovereignty would be retained, whilst guaranteeing that the Soviets would take away no more of their homelands. From 7 October, German officers were deployed among Romanian forces as military advisors. These consultants had soon arrived in such numbers that the Soviets clearly considered their treaties with the Germans violated.

With Finland, Hitler proceeded with more caution, trying to conceal his real intentions as long as possible. On 17 August 1940, German Lieutenant-Colonel Josef Veltjens approached Mannerheim on Marshal of the Reich Hermann Göring's behalf. He hoped that, like Sweden, Finland would allow supplies and the German troops who were on leave from their garrisons in northern Norway free passage through the country. At the same meeting, Veltjens informed the Finns that they were free to purchase war materials and machinery through him. The Finns realised that since all other avenues for international support had been exhausted, turning their back on these would-be allies would leave them helplessly isolated. Finally they had a way of rearming the nation. The following morning, acting president Risto Ryti instructed Mannerheim to verbally accept the request for the proposed transportation of troops.

The Germans concluded that Finland must be crawling with Soviet spies, and that their current allies would have to be given some excuse for their new arrangements with the Finns. Friedrich von der Schulenburg, the German ambassador in Moscow, was instructed to tell the Soviets a plausible story about a single anti-aircraft battery being transported through Finland to counter an expected landing by the British. When he failed to deliver this message in time, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Molotov demanded that the German–Finnish agreement, including all its secret protocols, be made available to him. On 2 October, the Moscow embassy was instructed to inform the Soviets that this agreement concerned a purely technical matter without any political implications. It was similar to the agreement reached with Sweden, allowing the transportation of troops through their territory to the garrisons in Norway. Because of its mundane nature, the Germans had not seen any need to notify their partners.

Some suspicions must have lingered, for the matter was raised again during Molotov's visits to Germany in mid-November 1940. Hitler personally addressed Molotov's concerns by disavowing any interest in Finland, except for the uninterrupted deliveries of nickel ore, cellulose and lumber. He further stressed the importance of avoiding a war that could lead to British or Swedish intervention. Hitler also reminded Molotov that they had already agreed in 1939 that Finland would belong to the Soviet sphere of influence.

During one such visit, the Soviets hosted a soirée at their embassy in Berlin. The festivities were interrupted by a surprise Allied bombing raid. Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Molotov naturally ended up sharing the same air shelter. While they waited for the all clear to sound, the two politicians resumed their talks. In order to avoid the

difficult topics brought up by Molotov, Ribbentrop tried to steer the talks towards a more positive subject: the division of the now defeated British Empire. Commenting on this topic, Molotov allegedly stated: 'If they are vanquished, then why are we in this shelter, and whose are these bombs which fall?' (Churchill, 1948–1953)

There has subsequently been some criticism that the decision to let German troops pass though Finnish territory ended up provoking the Soviets into war. However, Mannerheim's own memoirs state: 'What happened afterwards and what I now know of Molotov's visit to Berlin in November 1940 have totally convinced me that; without the German interests which the agreement for troop transportation highlighted, Finland would have already fallen victim to Russian attack during the autumn of 1940'. (Talvela, 1976) With this in mind, the arrangement made with the Germans seems to have saved Finland rather than condemned it.

During the latter part of 1940, Major-General Paavo Talvela repeatedly travelled to Germany in order to gauge the Nazi position on helping Finland should the Soviets attack again. During his first December visit, Talvela managed to arrange a meeting with Franz Halder. As Talvela presented the most recent Soviet demands, Halder interrupted him with the following: 'You do not need to worry about the loss of any materials if they do not weaken your ability to defend yourself. There will be a day when you will get it all back. Even Germany lost a lot of valuable materials in the Versailles peace, but has now recovered these many times over. When Finland was forced into the war last winter, Germany's own situation was such that it could not help, being tied up in the West itself … Now the matter in the West is resolved and Germany can take a completely new view about helping Finland'. Halder officially confirmed that during their earlier meeting with Molotov, the Soviets assumed that they could simply annex the country as previously planned. The Germans had now put a stop to this plan; he confirmed that they wanted to keep Finland independent.

In mid-December 1940, Talvela made his last visit to Germany. Although no evidence exists to suggest it, speculation persists that the Finns would have at this stage been privy to details of, or even participated directly in, the development of the latest draft of Operation *Barbarossa.* Nothing indicates that this was the case based on the correspondence between Talvela and Mannerheim. In his meeting with Talvela, Göring explained the following key points to the Finns:

1. Germany had not helped Finland in the past, mainly because prior to 1939, Finland, which desperately wished to remain neutral,

had refused the German proposal for a non-aggression pact. Furthermore, Finland had continued to vote against the German interests in all sessions of the League of Nations. So, no wonder that when Eastern Europe was split with the Soviets, the Germans did not object to Finland falling under their sphere of influence. After all, they had not expressed any interest towards Germany.
2. During the Winter War Finland fought valiantly, and the German population had started to again warm to the Finns. His own opinion was that in order to retain its independence, Finland should have made peace no matter the cost.
3. He also considered it a scandalous lie that Germany would prevent Sweden from helping Finland directly. 'He had himself even offered Sweden free artillery should they pass them in turn over to the Finns. The only thing he had asked in return was some minor concessions around Narvik, but the Swedes had refused this'. The Germans did not object to a Nordic alliance, but merely wanted to see a strong and free Finland, rather than a colony of Sweden.

During the same meeting, Göring stressed that Finland should continue to avoid conflict with the Soviets and to be as flexible as they could in their policy towards the East. In particular, there must not be another war during the winter months. When Talvela mentioned the Soviet demands on Petsamo, Göring stated categorically that there would be no Soviet invasion of this region. He pointed out that there was not even a road running from Murmansk to Petsamo. When Talvela mentioned that he was mistaken, and that the Soviets were currently constructing a road to the village of Kolosjoki, Göring cheered up: 'Really, that is the best news I have heard from that corner of the world for a long time, just the thing we were missing.' He also said that were the Soviets to invade Åland, they would have to be thrown out again, His last message to the Finns was: 'You can rest easy from now on'. (Talvela, 1976)

At the beginning of January 1941, Talvela wrote in his diary: 'Maybe this year will be brighter and just maybe, together with the Germans, we can now strike back at the Russians.' It seems that at this stage, there were no concrete plans, but at least the top military officers had had their hopes of a rematch kindled.

THE OUTBREAK OF THE CONTINUATION WAR

In January 1941, the Finnish Chief of the General Staff Lieutenant-General Erik Heinrichs was asked to travel to Germany to report on the Winter War. This was a relatively common exchange between officers at the time.

Heinrichs followed his strict instructions not to discuss politics or any future military operations. The Chief of the German General Staff, Colonel-General Halder, raised the possibility of one day fighting alongside Finland against a common enemy. Heinrichs refused even to entertain such an idea and clearly stated that Finland's government and its commander-in-chief would have no interest in any such operations.

Although later Soviet sources claim that Erich Buschenhagen, the former chief of staff of Army Command Norway, had discussed the plan to attack through Lapland as early as March 1941, this appears to be propaganda that he was coerced into making up in captivity after the war. Indeed, it would appear that many German officers came to deeply regret the fact that Finland had not been included earlier in such plans.

Finland's road to war truly began on 25 May 1941, when Finnish military representatives, headed by Heinrichs, visited Wehrmacht headquarters in Salzburg. Heinrichs' brief, according to Mannerheim, did not authorise him to make any executive decisions or to enter into any sort of agreements. (Mannerheim, 1954) During these talks, Alfred Jodl, the Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command (Oberkommando der Wehrmacht – OKW), expanded on the secret plans for the invasion of the Soviet Union.

According to Hitler's vision, Finland would willingly cooperate with Germany by tying down Soviet forces along the nation's border and by helping in the assault against Leningrad. Obviously, the Finns were not adverse to these plans as over the following days more envoys from each military branch met in Berlin in order to exchange intelligence and discuss tactics with their German counterparts.

(1890–1965)

ERIK HEINRICHS

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
KARELIAN ARMY

Jäger* Axel Erik Heinrichs held several senior positions at Army Headquarters. In 1921, he had moved to France to complete the special communications training for divisional and army corps commanders, and graduated from the top French military academy.

During the Winter War, Heinrichs assumed command of III Army Corps, and then was promoted to lead the whole Army of the Isthmus for the final weeks of the conflict in February 1940. During the Interim Peace, Heinrichs acted as the commander of the peacetime army. In May 1940 he took up a post as chief of staff at Mannerheim's headquarters.

During the Summer War in 1941, Heinrichs led the 100,000-strong Karelian Army. In October 1941, he was promoted to full general, returning in January 1942 to Army Headquarters and to the position of chief of staff.

Heinrichs was to be one of only two people to receive Finland's highest accolade, the Mannerheim Cross 1st Class, the other being Mannerheim himself. In 1945, Heinrichs became Mannerheim's successor as the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish Armed Forces. Due to the political upheaval from the 'Weapons Cache' case, this position proved to be a short assignment. Heinrichs resigned that summer, after which he worked as a military expert and writer.

* Prior to Finland gaining its independence, young nationalists sought out secret military training in the Imperial Germany. These men became Jägers in the Keiser's armies at the advent of WW I. All of these volunteers returned to Finland to fight in the Civil War of 1918. They formed the officer corps and backbone of the fledgling army of Independent Finland.

ABOVE
Tanks of the Armoured Battalion gathered at Hämeenlinna, just after mobilisation had been declared, on 18 June 1941. (The Parola Armour Museum)

RIGHT
The architects of Finland's restitution on 26 June 1941: (from left) Lieutenant-General Nenonen; Field Marshal Mannerheim; commander of the Karelian Army Lieutenant-General Heinrichs; and Major-General Paavo Talvela who was to lead Finnish troops in regaining the ceded lands. (Sa-Kuva)

Following these negotiations, the Finnish national parliament decided to sanction military action against the Soviet Union, but only if the Red Army attacked first. Otherwise, Finland was to remain strictly neutral. Despite this caveat, the Finnish high command decided to offer its support to the German venture. In June, the following demands for Finnish participation were presented: Finland would remain independent, Germany would have to attack first and Finland would only join the fighting after the Soviet Union had initiated hostilities.

On 3 June 1941, Germany officially pledged to assist Finland if it again found itself at war with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, detailed plans for such an eventuality were being hammered out in a secret conference in Kiel. These included the schemes for joint efforts in creating minefields along the coastlines and the Gulf of Finland, as well as granting the use of Malmi and Utti airports to the Luftwaffe. An earlier politically significant statement was the decision to allow 1,500 volunteers to join the German armed forces. In accordance, the recruitment for the Finnish Volunteer Battalion of SS-Division 'Wiking' started openly in late June 1941 (small-scale recruitment had begun in secret as early as March).

On 5 June, Mannerheim recalled Major-General Paavo Talvela to active duty. According to his diary entries from the time, Talvela was now apprised of the negotiations of recent few weeks. He was also given the precise start date and time of the German attack in the East. Mannerheim then asked

Initial German and Finnish Attacks, 1941

(1883–1960)

VILHO NENONEN
GENERAL OF THE ARTILLERY
INSPECTOR OF ARTILLERY

Vilho Petter Nenonen's parents were so certain of their firstborn's future career, that upon his arrival they placed the following notice in the local newspaper: 'Pekka and Amalia Nenonen have this Tuesday 06.03.1883 given birth to a healthy new soldier'.

True to his parents' wishes, Nenonen easily passed the entrance exams for the Cadet School in Hamina, first completing the compulsory two-year comprehensive studies, and then entering the seven-year programme for officer training. His first command was to be in the 28th Field Artillery near Kaunas, Lithuania, although he was unable to take part in the Russo-Japanese War as hostilities ended just before his command reached the front.

Upon his return from Manchuria, Nenonen embarked upon a three-year course at the world-renowned Mihailov Artillery Academy. Having graduated, Nenonen refused any postings in Finland, instead applying for a position on the Vladivostok front. During the next five years he steadily progressed to the rank of captain. Prior to World War I, Nenonen was promoted to the rank of major-colonel, and posted to a sea fort just outside Tallinn, Estonia.

When Finland gained independence, Nenonen returned to his homeland. Mannerheim recognised Nenonen's worth, and handed him the responsibility of modernising the Finnish artillery. In this role, he was to excel beyond compare.

During the Civil War, Nenonen managed to repatriate around 400 artillery pieces from his previous employers for the newly formed Army of Finland. Subsequently, Nenonen served as Defence Minister from 1923 to 1924, and as the commander-in-chief during 1924 and 1925.

Throughout the Finnish wars, Nenonen enabled the artillery to work to its maximum capacity and as Chief Inspector of Artillery he concentrated on acquisitions and domestic manufacturing. Prior to the Continuation War, he was credited with the development of the ingenious device called *korjausmuunnin* (although it seems the real inventor wanted to retain anonymity). This simple gadget enabled individual soldiers with access to a field radio to quickly and accurately coordinate simultaneous fire from multiple artillery batteries. At the battle of Tali–Ihantala, his innovative methods enabled the Finnish artillery to make history. For his efforts, Nenonen was awarded the Mannerheim Cross in January 1945. Nenonen resigned from active service in 1947.

him to take command of the task force leading the attack on Leningrad. 'I accept, and this is the greatest moment of my life,' answered Talvela. On the following day, he travelled to assume command of his new II Army Corps (Soon he transferred to lead VI Army Corps with the shifting focus of the Finnish attack). It has been a point of later extensive debate as to why the planned attack on Leningrad never took place. A joint operation with the Germans would surely have led to the city's collapse and thus freed up the 20 German divisions sorely needed elsewhere. Instead, Mannerheim soon changed his plans.

As early as 7 June 1941, German troops started to disembark in Finnish ports and harbours. They were to proceed north through the country for the upcoming operation. Three days later the Finnish Army received orders to transfer to wartime stations along the border. On 15 June, Major-General Hjalmar Siilasvuo's III Army Corps was placed under the command of Colonel-General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst's Army Command Norway,

which controlled German forces in northern Finland and Norway. On 17 June 1941, Rudolf Walden, the Finnish Minister of Defence, ordered the commencement of nationwide extraordinary military manoeuvres. In reality this meant the full mobilisation of Finnish wartime armed forces. In total 16 per cent of the population – some 630,000 men and women – were enlisted.

The army now comprised 16 full infantry divisions, two Jäger brigades and one cavalry brigade. Once drafted, these formations proceeded to occupy defensive positions that had been prepared during the Interim Peace. In general, the army had been quickly modernised with much better equipment than during the previous conflict. Gathering such forces placed a tremendous strain on the nation; nevertheless, the belief at the time was that in the case of war, the Germans would quickly reach their objectives, and the resulting shortening of the battle lines would help to return most of the Finns from the front.

Most of the Finnish rank and file still held grudges following the harsh terms of peace that ended the Winter War. Here is the grim mascot of the Heavy Artillery Battery deployed near Imatra on 6 July 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

Mannerheim's general headquarters was to be located in Mikkeli. In addition to the regular army, they were also responsible for the home-front formations including the female volunteers of Lotta Svärd, and the civil guard Defence Corps (the *Suojeluskuntajärjestö*).

At the time, the top military commanders were not yet sure whether the war would actually begin or not. This is reflected in Talvela's personal diary entry from 18 June, following a presentation at the Finnish Headquarters:

1. If the crisis between Germany and the Soviet Union leads to war, the following will most likely occur:
   I. The war will first start on the western borders of Russia (Baltics and Poland).
   II. In its second phase the conflict will escalate to northern Finland under Army Command Norway – Finnish troops would already be involved.
   III. A Finnish attack on the south-eastern border section.
2. My army corps' direction [of attack] has not been set, most likely either north or south of Ladoga. It is still possible that the Russians will attack first, we also have to prepare for this. (Talvela, 1976)

Shortly afterwards, Mannerheim ordered the garrisoning of the Åland Islands. This operation was to commence on 22 June – a date that the Germans had hinted would hold special significance. Despite earlier instructions from his superiors, the German military attaché chose not to officially inform the Finns about the start of Operation *Barbarossa* before 21 June. The attack was to start on the following night at 02:30. This left Mannerheim very little time to react.

The next morning, Hitler made a statement on the radio which brought the Finnish position of neutrality into question, alluding that both nations were fighting together: 'Side by side with their Finnish comrades stand the victorious fighters of Narvik on the shores of the Arctic. German divisions, commanded by the conqueror of Norway, together with the heroes of Finnish independence, led by their Marshal, guard Finnish soil'. (Wuorinen, 1948) This alarmed the Finns, who did not wish it stated that they were in any way about to participate in a war against the Soviet Union. All the foreign embassies in the country were quickly informed that Finland would remain neutral for as long as possible and that it would continue its peaceful diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. It was made clear to the Germans that from Finland's part there could only ever be defensive action aimed at preventing Stalin from invading again. The Finnish III Army Corps – subject to Army Command Norway – was expressly forbidden from crossing the border. For political reasons, the Germans themselves reissued this order on 24 June.

However, the Soviet leadership did not wait to hear from the Finnish diplomats; instead it launched its own bombing campaign only a couple of hours after the Germans began Operation *Barbarossa*. Without provocation, the Soviet Air Forces bombed Finnish fortifications and vessels around Hanko and Åland. Additionally, there were several instances of shelling and firing on the Finnish lines along the border. There was no retaliation of any kind to any of these incidents. Despite these undeclared acts of war, the Soviet diplomatic mission remained in Finland, although their ambassador refused to even accept the official Finnish reprimand for these unlawful attacks. On the evening of 23 June, Molotov demanded that the Finnish government explain their position regarding the war that the Germans had started. This was once again a ruse, as no reply could ever be received: the Soviets had already cut all communications between Moscow and Helsinki.

On 25 June 1941, at 04:00, with no declaration of war, the Soviets initiated a massive bombing campaign against civilian and manufacturing targets in Finland. A total of 487 aircraft took part in this first wave of terror bombings. Among the main targets were 15 Finnish cities and industrial centres including Helsinki, Turku, Lahti, Kotka, Porvoo, Heinola and Varkaus.

THE FINNISH *PÄÄMAJA* HEADQUARTERS

Mannerheim was the commander-in-chief throughout the conflict. His *Päämaja,* or commanding staff, was gathered at Armed Forces Headquarters. Its role was to ensure all of Mannerheim's decisions and plans were carried out.

During the Continuation War this officially comprised *Päämaja I*, or the General Staff Office, and *Päämaja II*, the Office for War Economy. The General Staff Office, which under Mannerheim had always resided in the town of Mikkeli, became synonymous with the word *Päämaja*. The Office for War Economy was located in Helsinki.

Although the Finnish Air Force and Navy had their own general staff offices, when it came to matters of war they were under the *Päämaja*'s control. The Navy was led by Major-General Väinö L. R. Valve and Air Force by Major-General Jarl F. Lundqvist.

In addition to military operations, the *Päämaja* was also responsible for the governance of the conquered lands in eastern Karelia. The headquarters in Mikkeli employed some 2,500 people during the war. The key *Päämaja* members of staff included:

- Chief of the General Staff General Erik Heinrichs; responsible for matters regarding political and civil governance.
- Quartermaster General Lieutenant-General Aksel F. Airo; commander of the army's operations, responsibility for military planning and troop manoeuvres. Airo was the de facto leader of the day-to-day actions of the armed forces, following Mannerheim's instructions.
- Inspector of Artillery General Vilho P. Nenonen; in command of the artillery, plus acquisitions and munitions.
- Chief of the Command Staff Major-General Wiljo E. Tuompo; the Command Staff was responsible for personnel and matters of training.
- Chief of Intelligence Colonel Aladár Paasonen: military intelligence and counter-espionage.

LIAISON HEADQUARTERS NORTH (*VERBINDUNGSSTAB NORD*)

Liaison Headquarters North was the command centre for German forces in Finland. This office was located together with the Finnish *Päämaja* at Mikkeli. General Waldemar Erfurth and his aides served there from 13 June 1941 until the signing of the armistice in autumn 1944.

Coinciding with these air strikes, Soviet artillery also opened fire along the length of the border. This prompted Mannerheim to grant his troops permission to return fire but not to cross the national borders.

That night, Finnish Prime Minister Johan Rangell presided over a closed session of parliament. There he informed his peers that the Finnish policy of neutrality had been rendered void by the Soviet aerial attacks, and that the nation found itself again at war. The parliament gave its unanimous support to Rangell's government. President Ryti had previously summarised the situation that Finland now found itself in: 'This war is Finland's only salvation. The Soviet Union will never give up its attempt to conquer Finland.' (Vehviläinen, 2002) In his memoirs, Mannerheim commented in the following manner about this period:

> As I have pointed out earlier, concentrating our troops at the front was done purely in accordance with the plan for defending our borders. After we had to accept the fact that the Russians had again attacked Finland, it became

STAVKA

Stavka grew out of the former Russian imperial General Staff Office. On 23 June 1941, the *Stavka Glavnogo Komandovaniya*, or Central Command of the Armed Forces of the USSR, was formed. This body was chaired by People's Commissar for Defence Simon K. Timoshenko. Other members included Clement Voroshilov, Molotov, Stalin, Chief of the Red Army Staff George Zhukov, Deputy People's Commissar for Defence Simon Budyonny and the People's Commissar for the Navy Nicholas G. Kuznetsov.

On 10 July 1941, Stalin became the chairman of Stavka. This organisational change also saw the addition of the newly promoted Chief of the General Staff Boris Shaposhnikov. On 8 August 1941, Stalin was made Commander-in-Chief of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. Stavka become known as *Stavka Verhovnogo Glavnokomandovaniya* – the Stavka of the Supreme High Command.

The most important military decisions of the time were approved in a session of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Politburo). Stavka's decisions were usually ratified after the general staff and different frontal and naval commanders had been given an opportunity to present their suggestions. When operational issues were being discussed, the front commanders concerned, their chiefs of staff and the senior commissars would be invited for a hearing.

The rapidly changing situations on the fronts and unreliable communication networks soon led to the creation of a second tier of command between Stavka and the front lines. These were the so-called 'strategic high commands' of the North-West, West, South-East and Northern Caucasus. Marshal of the Soviet Union Voroshilov headed the North-Western Strategic High Command from the onset of the Great Patriotic War. Stavka's representatives on the other fronts included Zhukov, Alexander M. Vasilyevsky, Timoshenko, Shaposhnikov and Alexey I. Antonov. They bore final responsibility for the fulfilment of all operations that Stavka authorised.

Within Stavka's jurisdiction were the following all-encompassing tasks: appointments from division-commander level and above, training plans for the officers, deciding strategic operations and plans, creation of strategic military formations and reserves, controlling the cooperation between the different branches of the armed forces and the independent partisans, liaison with the other Allied armies, development work on the home front, supervision of ongoing military operations, assessment and analysis of the former and finally the task of rolling out any general orders to the rest of the Red Army.

> important to move this defensive line forward into the natural choke points on the Karelian Isthmus and in Eastern Karelia. First and foremost, we had to neutralise the support areas the Soviets now possessed and also to create a thick-enough protective boundary for the vital parts of our nation. Because of our plight, it was also necessary to add the lands lost in the Moscow Treaty back to the fold of our national economy. All this dictated that we were now forced onto the offensive, but first we had to accomplish some large-scale redeployments.

Other sources contradict the above, stating that the German liaison officer to Finnish headquarters, Erfurth, had already sent a dispatch on 16 June 1940 clearly indicating war. In this missive, he had requested that the main Finnish attack be postponed a couple of days until after the Germans' own assault on the northern front. Erfurth explained the reason for this: 'The

On the night of the terror bombings, the Finnish parliament held this secret closed session in Helsinki. It was unanimously acknowledged that the Soviet Union had again brought a calamity to the north and Finland was once again at war. (Sa-Kuva)

Finns wanted to create an impression among their own people and people's representatives of being drawn in by the course of events.' (Ziemke, 1959) 'It is my absolute decision. Bolshevism must be relentlessly destroyed,' Hitler was later to inform Paavo Talvela, relaying his conviction to see this war to an end. (Talvela, 1977)

OPPOSITE
On 25 June, in order to provoke Finland into war, the Soviets began a series of terror bombings of civilian targets. During the first day alone, the defending Finnish Air Force and anti-aircraft crews shot down 27 enemy planes without suffering any losses of their own. This image shows a 40mm Bofors cannon ready for action. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

THE SUMMER WAR

In the mind of the Finnish population, the Continuation War was an unavoidable extension of the Winter War. Following the Soviet provocations, many felt there would now be an opportunity to correct the unfair terms of the 1940 peace treaty. At the time, it was commonly believed that this 'Summer War' would only last a few weeks, by which time the Germans would have forced the Soviet Union to capitulate.

Although the Soviets had spent the Interim Peace preparing for another invasion westwards, the timing and strength of the Finnish and German attack took them by surprise. By this stage, many of their reserves had already transferred west and south to combat the onslaught of Hitler's Operation *Barbarossa*. In addition, some of their most experienced commanders had been reassigned to hotspots on the Western Front, which further improved the odds for the Finns.

Despite having to send all available troops south, the Soviets still managed to combine five divisions into the Fourteenth Army on the Lapland front. North of Lake Ladoga, the Seventh Army wielded four divisions while on the Karelian Isthmus the Twenty-Third Army also commanded the same number. One more division was stationed at the leased Hanko naval base. Although these men were effectively cut off from their comrades, they could be used to

A junior sergeant inspecting ammunition. During the Interim Peace the artillery had been significantly improved. It now numbered 1,829 pieces with nearly 1,500 shells in place for each gun. Additionally, anti-tank weapons were finally plentiful. This was a completely different situation to that of the Winter War, where most weapons were obsolete and lacked enough ammunition to complete even a week's fire missions. (Sa-Kuva)

A picture taken on the first day of the Continuation War, which the Finns labelled the 'Summer War' as an extension of the previous year's icy conflict. Artillery units from Tampere are shown here on their way to the eastern front. Earlier in June, using the context of Extraordinary Manoeuvres, over a quarter of the total population of Finland had been mobilised. (Sa-Kuva)

launch an attack deep into the Finnish rear. In addition to the infantry, these armies could call upon a total of three armoured divisions, one motorised division and one fully mechanised army corps (the 10th Mechanised Army Corps, stationed on the Karelian Isthmus as a mobile reserve of Twenty-Third Army), although the latter would be recalled from the front at the beginning of August. The Soviets were able to again enjoy air superiority thanks to the three mixed air divisions spread along the front. In practice, this meant that on the Karelian Isthmus and in the area just north of Lake Ladoga, the Soviet Army had stationed 150,000 men, whereas the Finns were now able to amass nearly 230,000 men in the area. At the planned focus points of attack, the Finnish Karelian Army could therefore expect to enjoy considerable numerical superiority.

Nevertheless, the Red Army was still far more technically advanced. Each division was backed up by strong armoured formations and could call upon vast artillery and aerial support. Furthermore, the quality of the Soviet troops had considerably improved since the Winter War thanks to relentless training. This time, as Hitler threatened to overrun the whole country, the whole nation was more united behind the war effort. On the home front *Pravda* dropped its peacetime slogan 'Proletarians of all lands,

unite!' and replaced it with the more topical 'Death to the German invaders!' (Merridale, 2005)

Since the Red Army had not followed their pre-emptive shelling and bombing campaign with an infantry assault, the Finnish and German forces took the initiative and moved to the offensive instead.

The primary goal of the Finnish Army was to regain the areas lost in the Winter War and sunder or occupy those enemy strongholds just beyond the old border. These bases would be critical for any Soviet counter-attacks. National opinion was unanimously behind these objectives and the righting of the wrongs from the last war. Hitler's Operation *Barbarossa* had much higher aims, and it suited him well that the Finnish attack would tie up considerable numbers of Soviet troops and weapons.

The premise of the initial Finnish assault to the south was to split the two opposing Soviet armies at the northern corner of Lake Ladoga. The concentration of the main body of the armed forces north of Ladoga would then enable the Finns to continue their attack further into eastern Karelia and the Syväri (Svir) River. The Germans for their part planned to advance to the shores of the White Sea at Kantalahti, severing the strategically important Murmansk railway. From there the Wehrmacht could then swing southwards, freeing up the Finns from the front. For this purpose, all the Finnish troops north of Lake Oulujärvi were to fall under the jurisdiction of Army Command Norway. This made six divisions in total: four German and two Finnish. Meanwhile, the main body of Hitler's troops involved in Operation *Barbarossa* were expected to speed through the Baltics, capture Leningrad and meet up with the Finns along the Syväri River. That way the expectation was for the Finns to retain only a short front in central Karelia, should the Red Army not have completely surrendered by then.

After the Germans had signalled the Finns their desire for a joint attack to commence on 10 July, the front-line commanders received permission to extend reconnaissance across the border and occupy empty sections of the no man's land on 28 June 1941. The most dynamic commanders took this as orders to advance and capture preferred jumping-off points. Part of Mannerheim's daily order read: 'I call upon you to take part in a holy war against the enemy of our people. Our dead heroes are rising from their fresh, green graves at this moment in order to re-join us as brothers-in-arms of mighty Germany in a crusade against our enemy to secure the future of Finland. Brothers-in-arms: Follow me for the last time, now that Karelia is rising, and Aurora will light a new day for the Finns.' (Erfurth, 1979) The following day, German forces in Lapland and Norway launched their own attacks.

CHAPTER 2

SILBERFUCHS – ATTACK IN THE NORTH

In the northernmost theatre of war, a joint Finnish and German Army prepared for the invasion of the Soviet Union. It was here, under the direction of Army Command Norway, that the first Finnish soldiers advanced into the Soviet Union. Mannerheim's original staged plan called for his troops in northern Karelia to begin their own invasion shortly afterwards.

In the initial short-war scenario of their Soviet campaign, the Germans had envisioned the capture of the port town of Murmansk to be of minor importance. The longer the victory eluded them, the more important the cutting of the Murmansk railroad became.

In early March 1941, the British had carried out Operation *Claymore*, a successful commando raid in the Lofoten Islands in Norway. In the grand scheme of things this attack had little impact on the overall German war effort (save

Despite the poor roads, the Germans were ready to rely on their *Geländewagen*, a precursor to modern-day SUVs. Following up a report of the enemy in the direction of Lake Jelettijärvi, the squad shown here is trying to tow a desperately needed anti-tank gun to the front near Louhi on 15 May 1942. The Finnish hinterlands were to prove a poor operating theatre for the Wehrmacht's advanced war machinery, designed for more accessible fronts. (Sa-Kuva)

(1885–1968)

PAUL VON FALKENHORST

COLONEL-GENERAL
ARMY COMMAND NORWAY

In 1940, Paul Nikolaus von Falkenhorst was the commander during Operation *Weserübung* (*Weser-Exercise*), the conquest of Norway and Denmark. Following the successful invasion, von Falkenhorst remained commander of German army forces in Norway until 1944. He also commanded the German attack through Finland towards the Soviet Union from his headquarters in Rovaniemi in 1941. Upon the formation of Twentieth Mountain Army in 1942, von Falkenhorst returned to Oslo to lead the troops in Norway. After the war, he was convicted of war crimes and sentenced to death in 1946, but his sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment. He was released from prison in 1953 on grounds of poor health.

for the capture of a set of Enigma machine rotor wheels), but it did alarm Hitler. Following the raid, he decreed that the defence of Norway was of key importance, and therefore a large portion of German troops were to remain to defend the Atlantic coastline. This detracted from their attack both in terms of men and focus.

On the Lapland front, Colonel-General Nikolaus von Falkenhorst's Army Command Norway was responsible for the overall attack in Operation *Silberfuchs* (*Silver Fox*). The key to this mission was to attack the Murmansk railway simultaneously in two places: towards its northern origin at the port of Murmansk, and some 350km further south, towards the city of Kantalahti on the western tip of the White Sea. Von Falkenhorst's plan called for three separate spearheads, which meant that the operation was always going to be plagued by supply and communication issues between the isolated vanguards. There were only a couple of long and winding roads

Finnish troops advancing along the famous Raate Road through enemy territory towards Vasonvaara Mountain on 1 July 1941. The first German to fall in this theatre of war was buried at Latvajärvi about 30km from where this picture was taken. (Sa-Kuva)

available for transport. This meant that changing the focus of the attack would take a long time, or simply not be possible.

Soviet forces in the area held matching numbers against those of Army Command Norway. On their side of the border, the railway network would enable the Soviets to quickly move reinforcements from one sector to another. This was to prove a decisive advantage, and the longer the conflict dragged on, the more Allied aid poured in through this northern route.

The former border post falls on 4 July 1941. Men from Colonel Erkki Raappana's 14th Division became the first Finnish soldiers to cross into the Soviet Union. (Sa-Kuva)

Operation *Platinfuchs* (*Platinum Fox*), the northern pincer towards Murmansk, was to be carried out by Colonel-General Eduard Dietl's Mountain Corps Norway (*Gebirgskorps Norwegen*). After von Falkenhorst reassured Hitler that sufficient forces had been left behind to ensure the main mission of defending the Norwegian fjords north of Narvik, Dietl could send forward only the 2nd and 3rd Mountain divisions and the Finnish Task Force P (an independent, battalion-strong formation taking its name from 'Petsamo'). These men were to fight against the Soviet Fourteenth Army under Lieutenant-General Valerian Frolov (on 1 September Frolov was promoted to command the Karelian Front and was replaced by Major-General Roman I. Panin). At their disposal, north near Murmansk, were the 14th and 52nd Rifle divisions. Further south on the Kantalahti front, were stationed the 122nd and 104th Rifle divisions of the 42nd Rifle Corps. The army's mobile reserve, 1st Armoured Division, had only a short tour on the front as by mid-July it had been recalled for the defence of Leningrad.

The main German attack, Operation *Polarfuchs* (*Arctic Fox*), was to proceed in the direction of Salla–Kantalahti. This mission was to be carried out by General of the Cavalry Hans Feige's XXXVI Army Corps. His force included the 169th Infantry Division, the division-strong *SS-Kampfgruppe Nord,* as well as the Finnish 6th Division, which had been detached from III Army Corps. The Finns were led by Colonel Verner Viikla and had orders to support Feige's attack from the south along the Kairala–Alakurtti road.

Further south, Army Command Norway's forces were completed by Major-General Siilasvuo's III Army Corps. At this stage his command had been dispersed among the German spearheads and only the 3rd Division and some supporting battalions remained at hand. The corps was to proceed due east in the Kuusamo region. Luckily for Siilasvuo, the Soviets could only spare border guard formations and the main body of a single division to oppose him.

Operation *Silberfuchs* 1941

Despite the original intentions, support from both the Kriegsmarine and the Luftwaffe was very limited, most aircraft being reserved for the defence of Norway. A token force of 40 bombers, ten fighters and ten reconnaissance planes were to attempt the following wide-ranging missions: destroy the port facilities at Murmansk and Polyarny, provide close air support to the navy and infantry, intercept traffic on the Murmansk railway, destroy Soviet airfields and operate against the Soviet Navy in the Arctic Ocean. (Lunde, 2011)

DIETL'S OPERATION *PLATINFUCHS*

In his communication to Hitler on 21 April 1941, Dietl had used the following words to describe the area his army would soon have to traverse: 'The landscape up there in the tundra outside Murmansk is just as it was

after the Creation. There's not a tree, not a shrub, not a human settlement. No roads and no paths. Nothing but rock and scree. There are countless torrents, lakes and fast-flowing rivers with rapids and waterfalls'. (Carell, 1966)

On 29 June, four days after the first bombing of Finnish civilians, Dietl started his attack across this challenging terrain towards Kalastajasaarento and Murmansk. This was the beginning of German operations in the north, and was the first time in the war that non-Finnish troops invaded the Soviet Union from Finnish territory. Three days later the Finnish III Army Corps, under German command, would join the offensive.

The attack northwards towards the Kalastajasaarento Peninsula was carried out by the 3rd Mountain Division. From the outset, the resilient Soviet defence and the difficult terrain halted German progress. The Soviets ended up keeping the Germans at bay on Kalastajasaarento until the end of the war. On 12 July, the Finnish 14th Infantry Regiment was sent in as reinforcements all the way from Åland. These men set about defending the narrow isthmus

(1895–1961)

VALERIAN A. FROLOV

MAJOR-GENERAL
FOURTEENTH ARMY
KARELIAN FRONT

Frolov rose rapidly through the ranks during the Russian Civil War, and completed his training at the Military Academy in 1932. From there his ascent continued through brigade, divisional and army corps commands until he led the Fourteenth Army in 1939. In this role Frolov served through the Winter War and the German attacks in Lapland in 1941. In August of the same year, Frolov was made commander of the Karelian Front and promoted to lieutenant-general. On 22 February 1944, Frolov rose to the rank of general-colonel and effectively swapped roles with the now discontinued Olhova Front's commander Cyril Meretskov. Frolov continued to direct the Fourteeth, Nineteeth and Twenty-Sixth armies in northern Karelia and on the Kuola Peninsula. After the war, Frolov commanded various military districts until his retirement in 1956.

German PzKpfw III Ausf. H tanks from the 3rd Company of 40th Panzer Battalion, on their way to attack at Vasonvaara. This unit lent its support to the Finnish attempt to reach Uhtua. Following the success of the pincer move along both the Raate and Juntusranta roads, these tanks were sent in pursuit of the retreating Soviets. (Sa-Kuva)

FAR RIGHT
The rapid advance of German armour was halted on 11 July 1941 around Vuokkiniemi. One of their PzKpfw IIIs had fallen through the bridge over the Hiitosenvirta River and needed to be towed out of the water before pioneers could start the rebuilding work. (Sa-Kuva)

RIGHT
A German heavy machine gun deployed and ready on 22 August 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

(1890–1944)

EDUARD DIETL
COLONEL-GENERAL
TWENTIETH MOUNTAIN ARMY

Dietl was a devout National Socialist and one of Adolf Hitler's favourite commanders. During the invasion of Norway, Dietl led the 3rd Mountain Division. On 19 June 1940, Dietl was given command of Mountain Corps Norway on the Lapland front. In June 1942 the unit was renamed, and Dietl's responsibilities grew to encompass the new Twentieth Mountain Army.

Dietl's headquarters were positioned in Rovaniemi and he was considered a close friend of Finland. As a keen alpine downhill skier, he had helped to organise the 1936 Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. Whilst active in his command, in order to keep up with his hobbies, he took time to establish the first ski slope in Finland.

In June 1944, Dietl travelled back to the Reich in order to convince Hitler to give more material aid to the Finns. This trip was to prove fatal, as his plane crashed on 23 June 1944 near Salzburg.

leading into Kalastajasaarento. Despite being cut off, the Soviet troops in the area were supplied over the Barents Sea from the port of Murmansk. Again, the lack of naval assets and Luftwaffe formations proved critical.

Meanwhile the German 3rd Division transferred out of Finland, apparently the result of some unfortunate rumours. A story circulating in Germany was that the unit was held up north as part of a plot to exterminate the Austrians, who formed the majority of the division. Since there was also unrest in the Austrian provinces at the time, Hitler chose not to risk so many martyrs for the gossipers, and ordered the unit's recall. (Lunde, 2011)

The attack towards Murmansk itself by the 2nd Mountain Division fared slightly better. The main body of Dietl's force managed to cross the Titovkajoki River, and moved forward to capture the nearby village on 30 June. However, by 1 July Dietl's attack had slowly ground to a halt at the Litsajoki River. Although the Germans had managed to cross and form a bridgehead, the Soviet defences on the Litsajoki line were to hold. A timely landing by two Soviet battalions on the flank of the German spearhead had caused the attack to falter. Adding to Dietl's woes, this minor landing had also spooked Hitler, who then interfered by stripping a battalion and three artillery batteries to further strengthen the Norwegian defences against a possible invasion. In total such manoeuvres cost Dietl nearly one-third of his fighting force at a time when he actually needed further reinforcements to finish his mission. Intelligence previously received by Dietl had stated that there was only one under-strength Soviet division in the Murmansk area. Now, to their dismay, the Germans found out that they were actually facing two highly motivated and well-equipped divisions, with strong air and artillery support.

The Germans had had high hopes for their northern operation, but the Soviets had correctly understood the value of the Murmansk railway

in keeping the nation alive and hence concentrated enough men for its defence. Despite receiving more reinforcements in August, Dietl's depleted forces were unable to make headway. By mid-September it was finally becoming clear even to the most optimistic planners at Hitler's headquarters that their forces would not reach the port of Murmansk before the onset of winter.

On the whole, Dietl's *Platinfuchs*, which had been constantly overshadowed by Hitler's worries over Norway, had resoundingly failed. The operation had begun with 90km to cover to the objective at Murmansk. Three months later, despite having some of the most elite troops in the German Army at his disposal, Dietl was still 66km from reaching this goal. The first third of the journey had already cost his corps 10,290 casualties.

Troops approach the Soviet locomotive destroyed by a Stuka squadron on the Kiestinki–Louhi tracks on 15 August 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

XXXVI ARMY CORPS ATTACKS

General Feige's XXXVI Army Corps, operating further south, initially fared somewhat better in its own mission, Operation *Polarfuchs*. On 1 July 1941, taking full advantage of the 24 hours of daylight and the fact that the afternoon sun was in their enemy's eyes, the 169th Infantry Division and SS-Battle Group North launched their attack along the road towards Salla.

The Germans were supported by a flanking action by the Finnish 6th Division from the south, led by Colonel Verner Viikla. Since the Soviets had started the hostilities by attacking Finland, Mannerheim no longer insisted that the Germans prevent Finnish troops from joining in their attacks. The quality of SS-Battle Group North was established on the first day when the determined defenders broke their attack and spirit. Panicking SS troops fled straight past the corps headquarters, resulting in total confusion along the front line. Fierce battles raged for a week, culminating in a counter-attack by the Soviet forces at the crossing at the Kuola River. When the Germans eventually made it across the river, they found approximately 50 destroyed enemy tanks on the battlefield. Finally, on 7 July, the town of Salla fell. This was largely thanks to Viikla's 6th Division. The operation had exacted tremendous losses on the Germans.

Despite the efforts of the Luftwaffe, the Soviets kept pouring in reinforcements across the sea from Archangel. These fresh forces halted the German onslaught at the Kairala narrows. On 28 July, the Soviets launched

OPPOSITE
Following the granting of permission to capture suitable jumping-off points ahead of the main assault, Finnish pioneers set to removing barbed-wire obstacles and minefields. These preparatory steps were to save prudent front-line commanders a considerable amount of time and blood. (Sa-Kuva)

their own counter-attack and forced the Germans to dig in and defend. This was achieved at a heavy cost, as so far the 122nd Rifle Division had suffered 3,301 casualties and lost most of its artillery to the Germans. By 10 July, 71 light BT-7 tanks of the assisting 1st Armoured Division had been damaged, 33 of those beyond repair. One week later it started a staged transfer over to the Leningrad Front. The Finnish 6th Division was sent to cut the enemy supply roads in the rear, but failed in its task due to overwhelming opposing forces. So far, Feige's 20km jaunt over the border had cost the Germans 5,500 casualties. Hitler was incensed that the attempt to sever the Murmansk railway had failed so comprehensively.

The XXXVI Army Corps could not be reorganised for a new attack before 19 August. By surrounding the enemy positions, they managed finally to make the enemy retreat from the Kairala area. They crossed the Tuntsajoki River, just east of Alakurtti village, on 31 August. From there the XXXVI Army Corps continued to fight fiercely, reaching the Vilmajoki River on 17 September. In this defensively advantageous terrain, the spent troops were to dig in, and would not be dislodged before the end of the war.

THE FINNISH III ARMY CORPS

Major-General Siilasvuo's III Army Corps operated on a 100km stretch of border on the right flank of the German XXXVI Army Corps. At the beginning of the operation, Siilasvuo was forced to split his only division into a two-pronged attack. The main body of the 3rd Division, in the form of Task Force F led by Colonel Frans Fägernäs,

(1895–1941)

VERNER VIIKLA
COLONEL
6TH DIVISION

Born Verner August Viklund, he fought with the Prussian Jäger on the Eastern Front at Misse River, the Bay of Riga and the Aa River. During the Civil War, he acted as an adjutant to the 4th Jäger Regiment, taking part in the battle for Viipuri. Viklund had reached the rank of General Staff Officer by 1927. He changed his name to the more Finnish-sounding 'Viikla' in 1940.

During the Winter War, Viikla worked as the chief of staff for the North Finland Group during the battles of Suomussalmi and Kuhmo. The short spell of the Interim Peace saw him command the 15th and the 11th Divisions, in addition to acting as the interim chief of the Border Guards.

At the beginning of the Continuation War, Viikla was assigned the 6th Division, reporting to the German XXXVI Army Corps. He was to take part in Operation *Polarfuchs,* seeking to control the Murmansk railway at Kantalahti.

The operation did not go to plan, and in the end Siilasvuo, the Finnish commander in the area, gave orders for the troops to cease attacking and move to the defence. It seems that this decision was at least partially made due to the pressure the US government was putting on the Finns. Viikla took this defeat so personally that he committed suicide at his own command post at Karmanlampi on 18 December 1941. Tragically, he never knew that instead of being blamed for the army's demise, he had actually been recommended for promotion to major-general and for the country's highest award. Verner Viikla was awarded the Mannerheim Cross posthumously, although it was predated to 15 December 1941.

A Suomi machine-gun squad on the Rukajärvi front on 19 April 1943. On the Lapland front, the early and bitter winters always slowed down operations. In these conditions, the reliable Finnish Suomi sub-machine guns were coveted even by Soviet officers as personal weapons. The propaganda leaflets on the front were sometimes amended from the normal 'Throw down your weapons' to 'Surrender with your weapons'. Similarly, the Finns had sought out Soviet equipment during the Winter War, offering any enemy troops who surrendered their lives and a sum of American dollars for their weapons. The going price for a rifle was around $100 whereas for a new tank they would promise the tantalising sum of $10,000. (Sa-Kuva)

OPPOSITE
Finnish infantry advance over scorched-earth territory. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

was to attack from Suomussalmi in the direction of Uhtua. The rest of the division, namely the reinforced 53rd Infantry Regiment, or the so-called Task Force J under Lieutenant-Colonel Johannes Turtola, would proceed from Kuusamo towards the town of Kiestinki.

Initially everything went according to plan. The southern pincer captured Vuokkiniemi village on 3 July and the village of Vuonninen only four days later. After this good start, their progress ground to a halt. A month later, the Soviet 54th Rifle Division had finally stopped Siilasvuo's attack just in front of Uhtua village.

Meanwhile Turtola's Task Force J was making good progress. By 11 July, the Finns had reached the Soviet defences at the Sohjana River, on the narrows between lakes Pääjärvi and Tuoppajärvi. There, the Soviet 242nd Rifle Regiment from the 8th Rifle Division was able to keep Turtola's men at bay along their defensive line.

On 31 July, having received German reinforcements, Task Force J crossed the river and continued forwards immediately. The Soviets soon retreated rather than risk being surrounded. This action now opened the road to Kiestinki town, which was finally captured on 8 August. The joint German–Finnish attack drove onwards without hesitation. The Soviets quickly deployed their reserve 88th Rifle Division, led by Major-General Andrew I. Zelentsov (who would shortly perish in an air raid, to be succeeded by

Colonel Vladimir A. Solovyov). This strong force was able to stop Task Force J just east of Kiestinki.

Meanwhile, Army Command Norway was so satisfied with Siilasvuo's progress that it made a decision to divert the whole army's focus into this sector. Siilasvuo's next mission was to capture the Murmansk railway junction at Louhi and Tsuuppa harbour just to the north. In order to help with this new assignment, SS-Battle Group North was transferred to the area and Task Force J was reinforced to division strength. This newly formed Division J (DJ for short) was led by Colonel Väinö Palojärvi. The prolific military historian Wolf Halsti acted as his chief of staff.

On the eastern side of Kiestinki, the Red Army kept tying down the assault. The SS troops proved to be completely incapable of fighting in the wooded terrain, while the enemy had just been reinforced with the fresh 88th Rifle Division. The Soviets launched a fierce counter-attack on 20 August, which halted Division J's attack plans. The Soviet forces soon used the Finns' own tactics against them, surrounding Turtola's 53rd Infantry Regiment in a neat *motti* along

(1880–1953)

HANS FEIGE
GENERAL
XXXVI ARMY CORPS

During World War I, Feige was wounded whilst acting as the chief of staff of the 38th Infantry Division. After the war, he managed to hold on to his job despite of the cuts in personnel that the Germans were forced to make as a result of the Versailles Treaty. He was promoted to major-general in 1931, and lieutenant-general two years later. By 1935 Hans Feige had retired from the armed forces with the rank of general of cavalry.

When Adolf Hitler was preparing his assault on Poland, he decided to recall Feige to the colours. He was to act as the deputy-commander of II Army Corps while he simultaneously held the command of II Military District. Feige took part in the invasion of France in 1940 and was made a full infantry general.

After the invasion of Norway, where he served from 1940 to 1941, Feige was given command of XXXVI Army Corps in Finnish Lapland. During Operation *Silberfuchs,* Feige took the blame for the poor performance of his inexperienced SS-Mountain Division 'North'. He had been too accommodating to the SS commanders back in Germany, and had not ensured that these men were given the full training they needed. Despite the propaganda, the unit's 'high willingness to fight and deep determination' were no substitute for the combat skills required of it.

Feige continued to lead XXXVI Army Corps until October 1941, when the unit was renamed XXXVI Mountain Corps. Feige retired permanently on 30 June 1942.

HJALMAR SIILASVUO

MAJOR-GENERAL

III ARMY CORPS

(1892–1947)

Hjalmar Fridolf Siilasvuo (Strömber until 1936) won fame fighting in five wars, including the legendary feats his troops achieved at Suomussalmi and the Raate Road battles. During the Interim Peace, Siilasvuo had led V Army Corps and at the beginning of the conflict took over III Army Corps, reporting to the German Army Command Norway. Although Siilasvuo's planned role was to guard the German flank, his success shifted the whole army's focus onto his sector. Siilasvuo's later decision to stop his troops from further attempts at severing the Murmansk railway at Louhi led to worsening relationships with the German command in the area. During summer 1942, the Finns in Lapland let the Twentieth Mountain Army take control of their sector. Promoted to lieutenant-general, Siilasvuo took up the post of Chief Inspector of the Military Schools. In February 1944, Siilasvuo returned to command the newly formed III Army Corps on the Karelian Isthmus. Following the armistice agreement with the Soviets, Siilasvuo and his staff were transferred to Oulu to head the Finnish forces against the Germans in Lapland. For his energetic efforts to free Finland of all foreign troops, Siilasvuo was awarded the Mannerheim Cross in December 1944. After the war, he continued as the 1st Division's commander until the day he died.

the eastern railway line. (*Motti* was a term invented by the Finns during the Winter War to describe the splitting and encirclement of enemy formations.) At this stage Turtola's men and the 600 wounded awaiting evacuation were supplied only by meandering horse columns, which took nearly 30 hours to travel each way.

Palojärvi could not find a way to liberate these men. He therefore gave Turtola permission to prepare to break out of the *motti* themselves, to the south past the Kaputsnajajoki stream. While reconnoitring the best possible path of escape for his regiment, the patrol led by Turtola ran into Soviet scouts. Turtola was cut down in the ensuing firefight. In early September, the Finns finally managed to break the *motti*. They left behind several heavy artillery pieces and three German light tanks, which had been towed along mainly for moral support. The Finns lost nearly half of their men, a total of 1,683 casualties, in this encirclement.

After the victory at Kiestinki, the Soviet troops were to move to a rapid counter-attack from 4 September onwards. Siilasvuo requested Finnish reinforcements repeatedly from Mannerheim, but all his appeals were in vain as the commander-in-chief was of the opinion that the Germans had at least to be able to handle their own sector of the front. By the end of September all attacks towards the Soviet Union in the German area of control had ground to a halt. After some deliberation, Hitler gave orders that the attacks would not be resumed until the winter of 1942.

Despite these instructions from the Führer, von Falkenhorst and Siilasvuo decided to make one more attempt to capture the Murmansk railway in 1941. This attack was to push again in the direction of Louhi.

In order to help Siilasvuo with his mission, Army Command Norway was able to effect the transfer of only one Finnish regiment from Kalastajasaarento

The Mannerheim Cross 2nd Class was awarded 191 times, and the 1st Class only twice (to General Heinrichs and Mannerheim himself). Contradictory to earlier promises, on 22 June 1941, in order to snub Talvela who had wanted to promote Colonel Lagus ahead of other more senior commanders, Mannerheim decided to pass the honour of receiving the first cross to Lagus. Talvela's own diary notes his disappointment that such a great man (Mannerheim) could behave so pettily. (The Parola Armour Museum)

into Kiestinki, while SS-Mountain Division 'North'[1] was also strengthened with one additional regiment. On German orders, Siilasvuo's III Army Corps commenced a new attack on 1 November. The Finns managed to breach the enemy line of defence, but following political pressure and the failure of the Germans' own combat mission, Siilasvuo started to hold his forces back from 11 November onwards. When he realised that neither Army Command Norway nor the Finnish high command were going to send him any further reinforcements, Siilasvuo ordered the attack to halt completely on 17 November. Soon after, the Soviets launched a counter-attack, forcing the troops to return to roughly the area they had controlled at the start of the month. The Soviets lost another 3,400 men in this push. Although no one knew it at the time, this last failure meant that the Murmansk railway, so tantalisingly close, would never be reached.

The failure of this attack also had serious political ramifications. The Germans had come to believe that Siilasvuo's retreat was not so much due

1 In September 1941 SS-Battle Group North was converted into a division and renamed SS-Mountain Division 'North'.

The Finnish tactic of flanking attacks advancing cross-country would sometimes put the men under much strain prior to battle, despite the advantages of surprising Soviet forces. This image shows the 50th Infantry Regiment advancing near Syväri. (Sa-Kuva)

to the Finns' inability to fulfil their mission as to their willingness to do it. Both the British and especially the Americans had been heaping political pressure on Finland to stop the advance. According to them, the Finnish attacks against the Murmansk railway constituted a definite threat to the security of the United States, as this would have prevented their aid from reaching the Soviets. The Western Allies had also demanded that III Army Corps cease its operations and return to Finnish control. Mannerheim would no doubt have briefed Siilasvuo on these wider considerations, and they could certainly have helped him to make his mind up.

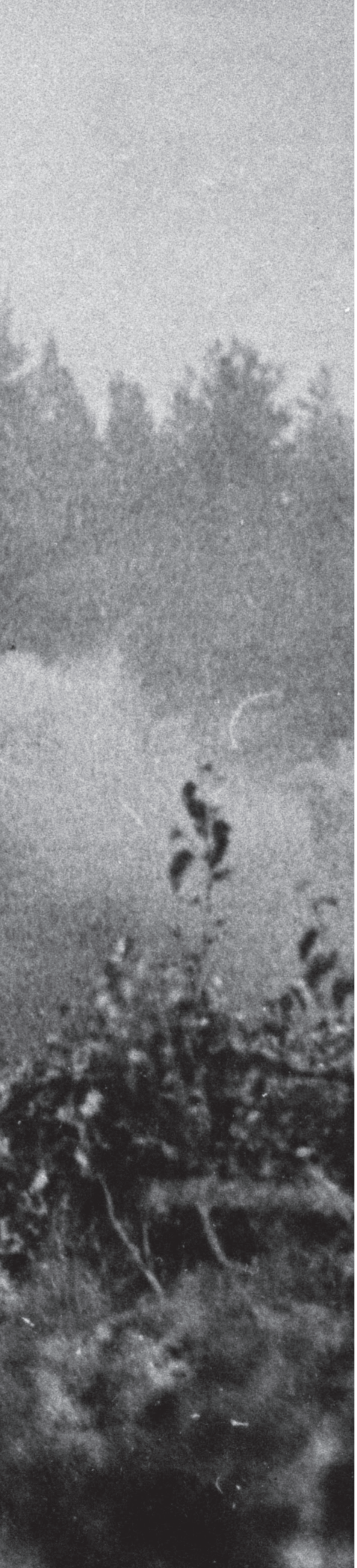
The failure to cut the Murmansk railway played a decisive role in the years of war to come. Eventually about one-quarter of all aid that was to reach the Soviet Union arrived via this route, including 5,218 tanks, 7,411 aircraft, 4,932 anti-tank guns, 4,000 rifles and machine guns, 4,338 radios, 2,000 field telephones, 1,803 radar sets, 473 million projectiles, nine torpedo craft, four submarines, 14 minesweepers, 10 destroyers and a battleship. (Woodman, 1994) Of further importance were the steel, aluminium and especially the food products that were delivered in great quantities. Nikita

S. Khrushchev wrote in his memoirs: 'Without Spam, we couldn't have been able to feed our army. We had already lost our most fertile lands – the Ukraine and northern Caucasus – to the Germans'. (Khrushchev, 1971)

While German operations in Lapland floundered and failed, the Finnish Army was about to start its offensive in the south. The initial action was to be handled by a single independent division, the 14th Division under Colonel Erkki Raappana, which operated on the border between the areas controlled by Army Command Norway and the Finnish Karelian Army. On 4 July, Raappana's men were the first troops directly under the Finnish high command to cross the border, officially launching the Finnish invasion of the Soviet Union. Against Raappana, the Soviets had positioned 54th Rifle Division under Major-General Ilja V. Panin (not to be confused with Roman I. Panin, commander of 42nd Rifle Corps and from 1 September Fourteenth Army). Ilja Panin had around 14,500 men under his command, and was responsible for approximately 338km of frontier wilderness.

Colonel Raappana's men quickly defeated the Soviet forces at Lake Kolvasjärvi and then proceeded to capture Repola village on 8 July. From there the division continued towards the town of Omelia, where separate detachments operating on both of Raappana's flanks enabled him to ensnare Lieutenant-Colonel Stepan Tshurilov's 337th Rifle Regiment into a *motti*. Just before the encirclement was completed, on 20 July, Tshurilov's command had been reinforced with 1,047 fresh men. Sadly most of these lacked any military training. By 24 July, the majority of Soviet forces in Omelia had been destroyed. A total of 2,170 men succeeded in escaping their fate, mainly by crossing over Lake Roukkulanjärvi on makeshift rafts. So far the Soviets had lost over 4,000 men in the battles in this sector. At Omelia the Finns captured 300 prisoners and significant amounts of equipment, including 24 field artillery pieces, 26 guns, 40 mortars, 50 cars, a dozen tractors and over 300 horses.

From Omelia, 14th Division continued towards Rukajärvi on 9 August. They reached the village of Rukajärvi by 6 September. From there Raappana continued to follow the retreating enemy towards the Ontajoki River. His attack was finally halted there on Mannerheim's direct order on 17 September. From Rukajärvi the troops were able to form a unified front, connecting up with the Finnish Karelian Army, bypassing Lake Seesjärvi and proceeding through Paatene in the south. This connection was finally completed with the 8th Division advancing from the south on 26 October. The 14th Division then settled down to nearly three years of trench warfare, only starting to withdraw back towards the former borders in September 1944. Meanwhile, the main Finnish offensive had started in Ladoga Karelia.



CHAPTER 3
THE CONQUEST OF LADOGA KARELIA

Following a request by the German high command, the Finnish Karelian Army was to focus all its available six divisions into a spearhead and start its attack on the north side of Lake Ladoga on 10 July 1941. Finnish military records do not hold copies of an overall plan for the campaign, and indeed the German request for the attack to be placed north of Ladoga and not on the Isthmus did not come through before the last week of June. However, by tracing the communications between the different units and headquarters it is possible to draw reliable conclusions as to the intent. Mannerheim's strategy did not call for an all-out attack but rather a staged approach where the different army corps would join in at the most opportune moment. Therefore, II and IV Army corps were to remain in defence for practically all of July. Similarly the reinforced 17th Division, under the name Group Hanko (led by Colonel

Pioneers from the 2nd Division assaulting an enemy machine-gun dugout on 26 July 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

ABOVE
The Finnish Cavalry Brigade on their march to the front lines near Tolvajärvi on 24 July 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

RIGHT
Under fire, Finnish pioneers use assault boats for a river crossing on 25 July 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

Aarne Snellman and comprising the 17th Division and 4th Coastal Brigade), was to remain guarding the strong Soviet naval base at Hanko, lest these forces attempt an attack in the Finnish rear. The large island of Åland in the mouth of the Gulf of Bothnia was garrisoned by two further brigades. At this time, practically all of the Finnish Navy was operating in the vicinity of the Åland archipelago and Hanko.

Mannerheim hoped that by first cutting the enemy lines at the top of Lake Ladoga, the Red Army could then be rolled up on either side of the lake. In accordance, the first goal of Heinrich's Karelian Army was to drive a wedge between the Soviet Seventh and Twenty-Third armies. Heinrich planned for VII Army Corps under Major-General Woldemar Hägglund to bypass Lake Jänisjärvi from the south on their way to the town of Sortavala, while the main Finnish push was to be performed by VI Army Corps – the command of which had been passed to Talvela on 30 June by Mannerheim – on the west side of Jänisjärvi. Talvela's northern flank was to be guarded by Major-General Waldemar Oinonen's two-brigade Group O. Finnish intelligence had established that the Soviets had built strong fortifications near the border but that these were now lightly manned by only two divisions.

The Red Army's original plan to concentrate their attack formations in this sector and thus heavily reinforce the front had been indefinitely postponed due to the start of Operation *Barbarossa*. Instead, all three armies had been given strict orders on 26 June to assume defensive positions and prevent the Germans from reaching Leningrad or the Murmansk railway. In accordance, the Seventh Army led by Lieutenant-Colonel Philip D. Gorelenko issued orders to its available formations. The 54th (deployed to the north, in the Uhtua area), 71st and 168th Rifle divisions were to hold the prepared fortifications along the border while the 237th would remain as a reserve (until relocated to the Baltics on 4 July). Gorelenko's men would not have to wait long; in line with German requests, the Finnish Karelian Army was scheduled to start its attack on the north side of Lake Ladoga on 10 July.

The German invitation to join the war had reached the Finns as late as 26 June, and thus did not leave much time for either planning or completing the attack preparations. Talvela's VI Army Corps was expected

Major-General Talvela and Colonel Lagus at Salmi, approximately 4km from Tulema village on 19 July 1941. As recognition for their brilliant military leadership and achievements during both the Winter War and the Summer War to date, they would soon become the first awardees of the Mannerheim Cross, the highest military commendation in Finland. (Sa-Kuva)

to spearhead the Finnish war effort. During the Winter War Talvela had provided the nation with its first critical and morale-boosting victories at Tolvajärvi and Äglājärvi. Now he was to again prove his worth as an offensive commander, quickly improving the plans he had inherited and laying down the foundations for the attack. Immediately upon his arrival, Talvela approached Karelian Army headquarters and insisted that his troops should be allowed to advance over no man's land in order to improve their offensive capabilities. Once the tactical freedom of command that he required was entrusted to him, Talvela did not waste any time. He set all his units to seize important strategic jumping-off points.

On 4 July, Talvela gathered his commanders and shared his thoughts on how the offensive should proceed:

1. In these sparsely populated areas fighting is usually concentrated around the roads.
2. The enemy tends to hug the roads tightly [and not venture into the wilderness].
3. The terrain in general is very difficult to cross.
4. Speed and determination are usually keys to victory, and therefore long marches through the wilderness should be avoided, unless there is at least some kind of a path.
   a. Otherwise the men will not be able to fight at full strength when contact is finally made.
   b. Also when the men realise that it is difficult or impossible to transport the wounded, it will weaken their resolve.
5. Therefore I will always recommend a simple operation:
   a. Strongly striking in the direction of the road with the support of heavy weapons.
   b. However, this does not mean attacking in a line. The plan must always include a flanking move, ideally from two directions simultaneously.
   c. This manoeuvre should not be so wide that tactical contact is lost between the detachments.
   d. In forested terrain, it is usually only possible to orientate oneself based on the sound of gunfire.
6. When the enemy is made to retreat, he must be pursued ruthlessly. This is crystal clear to all commanders but only the select few can follow it!

The initial focus of VI Army Corps was to push quickly towards the Loimola

area. From there the Finns could then turn south-west, hammering the Soviet forces against the banks of the Jänisjoki River. It was hoped that this would lead to the kind of battles that would result in the large-scale destruction of enemy forces.

The first milestone for VI Army Corps was to capture the village of Korpiselkä on the border, where the Soviet fortifications blocked the Finns' passage on the easterly road. As early as 9 July, Talvela sent one regiment to capture the crossroads in the Ristikangas area, just north of Korpiselkä village, in preparation for the main corps attack. When the full attack of the Finnish Army started the following day, this proved to be a brilliant strategic move. From Ristikangas his troops were able to advance cross-country, bypassing Korpiselkä while at the same time threatening the flank of the Soviet main defensive positions. This intimidation and the well-prepared preliminary shelling showed prudence. In the end it still took nearly 20 hours of intensive combat and the direct fire of all the massed artillery to destroy the Soviet dugouts at the village.

On Talvela's right flank, Colonel Kaarlo Heiskanen's 11th Division had been deliberately drawing attention to their sector by capturing forward positions from 4 July onwards. In this way the main thrust towards Korpiselkä–Ristikangas would not be highlighted to the Soviets. The 11th Division's mission was firstly to capture the heavily fortified town of Värtsilä, a large industrial centre on the border. From there Heiskanen's troops could proceed along the northern edge of Lake Jänisjärvi.

The 11th Division launched its primary attack on 10 July, aided by a simultaneous assault from the south-west by a detachment from the neighbouring VII Army Corps. The town of Värtsilä was taken the following morning, as fear of being surrounded drove the Soviet garrison to escape towards the south-east. The Finns gave immediate pursuit until they were halted by the prepared positions near the shores of Lake Jänisjärvi. Meanwhile, the division's second detachment (the 8th Infantry Regiment) reached this same defensive line further north at Kaatiovaara Hill. Although they were able to breach the Soviet lines, the 11th Division was once again stopped only after a couple of kilometres' progress. This time, Heiskanen's troops faced a much better prepared string of fortifications that the Soviets had cleverly built in depth in front of Suonlahti village. The Finns were now forced to spend time taking stock and carefully preparing a concentrated attack.

Meanwhile further north-east, the 1st Jäger Brigade and the 5th Division advancing from Ristikangas were making the best of their breakthrough by driving the enemy in front of them all the way to the village of Kokkari. As

At the battle of Loimola, Lieutenant-Colonel Merikallio and his 1st Jäger Brigade destroyed Soviet positions at point-blank range using 37mm PAK 36 anti-tank guns. The Finns acquired 200 of these weapons from the Germans between 1940 and 1941. (Courtesy of the private collections of Esa Muikku)

a result of centuries of hostile raids, the village had been built at the top of a steep hill in typical Karelian fashion. Upon reaching this vantage point, the Soviets decided to turn and make their stand. Lieutenant-Colonel Väinö Merikallio led the 1st Jäger Brigade in the attack. The following observations by Merikallio, who did not survive the war, were posthumously published in the book *Jääkäriprikaati Hyökkää*:

> We know very little of our enemy. They have dug in in the forest on both sides of the Tolvajärvi Road. They haven't had time to cut the underbrush in front of their firing sectors but they do seem to have plenty of machine guns, anti-tank weapons and mortars. The Soviet 6in. batteries from Tolvajärvi are offering strong support …
> 21:40 hours, preparatory bombardment from our own artillery. This is a new experience for most of our men and impresses the Jäger greatly. It feels

Karelian Army Attacks, 10–32 June 1941

(1897–1973)

PAAVO TALVELA
MAJOR-GENERAL
VI ARMY CORPS

After the Civil War, the then Major Paavo Juho Talvela temporarily resigned from the army to lead the unofficial Finnish volunteers during the Kinship Wars of the 1920s. Talvela graduated from the Coastal Artillery School's Battery Commander Course in Britain in 1923, and the Finnish Academy for the General Staff in 1926. In 1930, Talvela again resigned from service, this time as a political gesture and in order to focus on his business career. He then held several senior business and administrative positions, but always remained in the close circle of Mannerheim and other top commanders.

During the Winter War, Colonel Talvela led his own army corps formation, Group Talvela. Mannerheim's trust in Talvela was not misplaced, as he gave the nation its first victory over the Soviets at Tolvajärvi and Ägläjärvi, inspiring the Finnish defenders on all fronts. Talvela was soon promoted to the rank of major-general and transferred to take command of III Army Corps in the Karelian Isthmus hotspot just prior to the end of the Winter War.

During the Interim Peace, Talvela became the President of the Red Cross Invalid Committee and the Brothers in Arms Association. He was also granted quasi-dictatorial rights in setting up vast foreign shipments and trade operations through the Arctic port of Petsamo.

When the Continuation War began, Mannerheim insisted that Talvela should command the focus of the Finnish attack. Again, Talvela did not disappoint as his VI Army Corps was the first formation to reach its objectives. He was subsequently made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross. Talvela spent practically the whole period of trench warfare as Finland's military envoy to the German Army headquarters, until finally, in spring 1944 and with the Soviet main offensive imminent, Lieutenant-General Talvela took command first of II Army Corps and then shortly after of Aunus Group. When he succeeded in stopping the Soviet advance at the U Line, Talvela was again sent to Germany. There he went on to refuse proposals from Heinrich Himmler, who requested that he stay and head up the new Finnish government in exile. 'I only take my orders from Marshal Mannerheim,' was his terse reply. After the war, Talvela held many senior business positions. On 6 December 1966, Paavo Talvela was promoted to the rank of general of infantry.

so much safer to start an attack after a proper artillery strike ... the enemy responds with increased ferocity. Mortar shells land in great clusters while the anti-tank guns firing tracer rounds create their own eerie illumination

…22:15 hours, the bombardments shift step by step ever further, but there are still no signs of the attack rolling forward. From several directions the noise of infantry arms echoes louder and louder, I take this to mean that at least some units are pushing forward … Suddenly wild cheering erupts from the right wing of the 4th Battalion. Men rise from behind the cover and rush straight at the enemy. Despite heavy losses the Russians are holding on fiercely. They stay in their dugouts until our boys' machine guns and grenades clear the positions. Some jump out and try to flee, but it's too late and only a couple manage to escape. (Merikallio, 1954)

By 12 July, Colonel Lagus' 5th Division and the 1st Jäger Brigade temporarily under his command had managed to reach the former Winter War

Finnish infantry overrunning Soviet trenches; the attack continued without halting. (Sa-Kuva)

Soviet troops, possibly of the Sortovala garrison, practising with bayonets before the Finns returned in 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

battlegrounds at Lake Tolvajärvi. From there the Finns turned southwards towards the critical Loimola village crossroads, where the Soviets had now focused all their remaining reserves.

However, due to the lack of armoured vehicles and heavy weapons, combined with the Soviets' well-fortified positions – some of which had been abandoned by the Finns themselves during the Winter War – the capture of the village did not progress as planned. This greatly frustrated Merikallio; so far he had been keenly following Talvela's war mantra: 'keep continuous pressure on the enemy. Do not give them a moment's reprieve to catch their breath.'

Initially Merikallio could not see any way of breaching the Soviet lines without the support of heavy artillery or tanks. In a moment of enlightenment, while lying in a ditch at the very front of the attack, he came up with a new, dangerous plan. Merikallio immediately ordered all available trucks and transports to be loaded full of infantry. He then set each vehicle to tow an anti-tank gun. These weapons had so far been ineffective when fired from a long distance. Now Merikallio ordered them to be driven straight to the village edge and to blast everything in their sights at point-blank range.

(1888–1956)

PHILIP GORELENKO
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
SEVENTH ARMY

In 1917 Philip Danilovich Gorolenko joined the Red Guards as a guerrilla commander. The following year, he was sworn into the Red Army. During the Russian Civil War, Gorolenko served as a brigade and division commander.

During the Winter War, Gorelenko led the 50th Rifle Corps. He was made a Hero of the Soviet Union when his men finally breached the Mannerheim Line in February 1940. During the Interim Peace, Gorelenko was the acting commander of the Leningrad Military District. In the Great Patriotic War, from January to September 1941 he led the Seventh Army on the Finnish front, and in June 1942, Gorelenko was appointed to command the Thirty-Second Army on the Maaselkä front, pitted against the Finnish II Army Corps.

At the end of the war, despite having first pushed the Finns back to the old Moscow Treaty borders, his troops suffered a resounding defeat in the Ilomantsi area. Gorelenko retired from service in 1951.

The Soviets realised the threat too late, and rose hastily from their dugouts to fire at the lorries speeding past. Soon all ten anti-tank guns were unlimbered and firing at the flanks of the defensive positions. The Soviets could not stand this for long and quickly panicked. The fleeing men of the Red Army set fire to some of the houses while Finnish bicycle troops continued to harass them through the village. Their wild ride finally halted at the railway station, where the Soviets used an armoured train to rally their men. To begin with, the Finnish anti-tank weapons proved utterly ineffective against this steel fortress. However, a well-aimed shot at a nearby fuel tank set everything ablaze. The train crew watched in dismay as the fire spread over the adjacent tracks, and hastily decided to pull out of the village. While the train escaped, the Finns severed the railway and consolidated their position as masters of Loimola village.

The loss of Loimola on 14 June fundamentally changed the situation for the entrenched defenders at Lake Jänisjärvi. Therefore the Soviets decided to retreat from their robust fortified positions rather than risk being surrounded and trapped there. This in turn enabled Colonel Heiskanen's 11th Division on the right flank to move forwards once more. The division soon captured Suonlahti village and proceeded to the southern end of the lake.

Meanwhile the 1st Jäger Brigade was able to continue its relentless and rapid attack from Loimola. The opposing Soviets simply did not have sufficiently strong formations to halt them for long. By 16 July, the 1st Jäger Brigade had already reached the shores of Lake Ladoga at Koirinoja crossroads – where several prolonged *motti* battles had taken place during the Winter War, and where the Finns had allegedly buried three Soviet generals in short succession. The two Soviet armies fighting on both sides of the lake had lost contact. As a result, Talvela's left wing rapidly achieved all their initial objectives, firstly by creating the needed breakthrough, and then by proceeding to destroy all the enemy reserves in the area. The VI Army Corps had now laid the foundations for the major victory expected of the Karelian Army.

Finnish soldiers deploying a heavy machine gun. Teams of two to three men would normally be responsible for carrying this cumbersome weapon across the dense forests of Karelia. (Sa-Kuva)

When the 1st Jäger Brigade turned towards the Jänisjoki River in order to make contact with the troops of 11th Division, it ran into a strong Red Army marching column near Leppäsyrjä crossroads. In the ensuing battle, this enemy formation was completely destroyed and their weapons, including 48 heavy mortars, fell into Finnish hands. It turns out that these men had been on their way to garrison Loimola village. Had the Soviets made it there sooner or had Merikallio not proceeded to attack with such alacrity, capturing the village would have demanded far greater forces from the Finns, and might have halted the advance on the whole front.

Before the stunned Soviets had time to retaliate and push back the Finns from shores of Lake Ladoga, the 11th Division was able to strengthen the breach by reaching its intended positions along the Jänisjoki River.

Further to the north, Oinonen's Group O had been primarily tasked with guarding the left flank of Talvela's main attack by crossing the wilderness. Group O consisted of the Cavalry Brigade and the 2nd Jäger

Brigade. Although the 2nd Jäger Brigade had begun its advance on 8 July, and benefitted from the breakthrough by VI Corps, its forces were halted by the strong enemy defences at Ristisalmi just east of Tolvajärvi. The two cavalry regiments on Oinonen's left flank were to perform a two-pronged attack. However, these were halted almost immediately after crossing the border by the well-fortified Soviet lines. Oinonen then took time in order to plan how to surround the enemy positions. In the end, the actions of Group O did not have great significance for this stage of the attacks, while south of Oinonen's positions the VI Army Corps would continue from victory to victory. In a private meeting on 18 July at Värtsilä. Mannerheim agreed with Talvela's assessment that Group O's mission had been a resounding failure. Talvela further continued to criticise Heinrichs' decision to set these lightly armed forces against known strong Soviet positions.

VII ARMY CORPS ATTACKS

The initial mission of Hägglund's VII Army Corps was to advance directly towards Sortavala on the shores of Lake Ladoga. However, the Soviets had correctly anticipated this threat and made their preparations. Due to the lack of heavy artillery and the latest intelligence gathered, Hägglund altered the plans, and instead had his men advance hugging the southern shore of Jänisjärvi.

It is worth noting at this stage a strange failure to seize the strategic advantage by the Finnish commanders. In late June, in preparation for their future role in the offensive, 2nd Division (led by Colonel Aarne Blick from the neighbouring II Army Corps) had already secured a bridgehead south of Lake Pyhäjärvi. Unfortunately, this ideal jumping-off point was not exploited by the Finnish high command or the Karelian Army, and VII Army Corps ended up having to fight every step of the way.

The attack by VII Army Corps began on 10 July amidst fierce thunderstorms, as Colonel Antero Svensson's 7th Division pushed forward on a very narrow front with practically all its available forces. Only a couple of companies had been left guarding the rest of the front, while a separate detachment had already been sent to help VI Corps liberate the town of Värtsilä.

From the outset, the Red Army defended their fortified positions fiercely. Finnish artillery was called in to soften the enemy time and time again, whilst the infantry tried to push forward on either side of the Soviet lines. These flanking actions frequently left some of the enemy troops surrounded, but more often than not, they were able to break out again during the following days' fighting. The progress of the 7th Division was very slow and brought with it heavy losses. By 15 July, Svensson's men had finally

Despite the propaganda spread by the Commissariat, the Soviets who surrendered were usually treated very well. Unfortunately, many terrified soldiers fought to the death, believing that this was the lesser of two evils. (Sa-Kuva)

reached the heavily defended Soviet positions along the railway at Matkaselkä.

The 19th Division, which started its attack furthest south and closest to the shores of Lake Ladoga, had been left with only one regiment and one additional battalion while the rest of its troops had been passed on to act as the VII Army Corps reserve. Consequently, Colonel Hannu Hannuksela chose to attack through the virgin forest in between two Soviet strongholds at Niinisyrjä and Repomäki. His plan was to strike first through this unexpected and hopefully weakly defended area, and then turn to assault the rear of both enemy strongholds. Due to the lack of effective artillery support, the division managed to advance a mere 5km during the first three days. After this the extremely difficult terrain and the Soviet countermeasures halted the Finns altogether.

Shortly afterwards, attacks from the bases at Niinisyrjä and Repomäki completely cut off Hannuksela's spearhead. Contact between the different elements of the division was not regained before 15 July. By this stage Talvela's VI Army Corps was already approaching its objectives, so in order to get his forces moving, Hägglund now decided to concentrate the main thrust of both the 7th and 19th divisions to converge at Matkaselkä. This finally paid off and his troops were able to advance. By the night of 17 July, Hägglund's men were able to work in tandem with Heiskanen's 11th Division, whose troops had already reached the opposite side of the Jänisjoki River.

After reaching the river, the 19th Division received orders to deal with the two strong Soviet fortifications to the rear, namely at Kumurinkylä and Ristiselkä, while Svensson's 7th Division would push towards Lake Ladoga. By 21 July, these men had finally fulfilled this initial goal and were able to swing west after the Soviet forces retreating towards Sortavala. Soon afterwards, a strong counter-attack by the Red Army again halted the advance of VII Army Corps.

(1893–1963)

JOHAN HÄGGLUND

MAJOR-GENERAL

VII ARMY CORPS

Johan Woldemar Hägglund was one of the first young patriots to take part in the *Pfadfinder* ('scout') course of March 1915. In addition to holding senior military commands, he enrolled in the Swedish Military Academy from 1931 to 1932. During the Winter War, Hägglund commanded IV Army Corps in Ladoga Karelia, where his actions introduced the word *motti* into military jargon. Hägglund was well liked by his men and officers and was to lead VII Army Corps in the Finnish vanguard through to the battles in Soviet Karelia during the Summer War. From June 1943, once VII Corps had been disbanded, Hägglund acted as Inspector General reporting directly to Mannerheim until the end of the war. He resigned from service in January 1945.

VI ARMY CORPS CROSSES THE OLD BORDERS

On 17 July, while VII Army Corps was still floundering towards Sortavala, Talvela gave his troops new orders to proceed east towards the town of Salmi and Lake Tulemajärvi. In order to capitalise on the earlier successes of Talvela's VI Army Corps, Mannerheim had dispatched the German 163rd Infantry Division from his personal reserves to augment Talvela's command. 11th Division was promised as further reinforcement, but for logistical reasons 1st Division from the Karelian Army's reserves was sent instead

(1901–1961)

ANDREW BONDAREV

COLONEL

168TH RIFLE DIVISION

Having begun his career in 1921 as a lowly private, Andrew Leontyevich Bondarev rose to command the 168th Rifle Division in August 1938. During the Winter War, his command came close to complete destruction in the Kitilä *motti* on the northern shores of Lake Ladoga. In the end the newly created Fifteenth Army managed to break the encirclement and resupply his troops. At the start of the Great Patriotic War, Bondarev's division was still on the Finnish front and soon became trapped again. Despite this he was promoted to the rank of major-general and was given command of the Eighth Army (Leningrad Front) in autumn 1941. He was made a lieutenant-general in 1943. After the war, Bondarev held several senior posts with different Guards Rifle corps until resigning due to illness in 1955.

Talvela set the German 163rd Infantry Division to guard VI Army Corps' left flank and tasked them with securing the Suojärvi–Suvilahti area. The 1st Division was not yet available to take part in the attack as it was still in transit. As soon as it arrived, the division was expected to catch up with the Finnish vanguard and start advancing along the road due east from Kolatselkä. Meanwhile, the 5th Division and the 1st Jäger Brigade were to continue along the coastal road towards the town of Salmi.

The battle for Salmi lasted two days. Soviet troops were freshly deployed there, and proved to be extremely tenacious. They continued to battle valiantly despite the risk of being surrounded, fighting the Finns every step of the way. During the battle Lagus sent the following missive to VI Army Corps headquarters: 'We are only winning ground one foxhole at a time and only once each defender in it has been killed.' A battle diary left behind by a fallen Soviet regimental adjutant describes the desperate situation:

> We only have 700 men left. All artillery, anti-aircraft weapons, medics and supply formations are completely gone. All we have left are two soup kitchens and two 45mm guns. Both armoured vehicles sent to liberate us were destroyed near Räimälä Bridge on 20.7.1941. Morokolo's regiment is very hungry and unable to offer any real resistance. I have started to gather troops from the men wondering aimlessly in the forests.

Eyewitness accounts from Salmi mention hundreds of Soviet corpses, some heaped into large piles. A captured prisoner at the time explained that the men left in a nearby *motti* had wanted to surrender, but the commissars would not let them. He said that they had already executed at least 30 men who had wanted to give up the fight. (Talvela, 1976) The capture of Salmi cost the Finns 50 casualties; the Soviet dead numbered around 500, and about 100 prisoners were taken.

Meanwhile to the north-east of Salmi and the 5th Division, the battalions of Lieutenant-Colonel Järvinen's task force emerged victorious from the fighting at Kolatselkä on 18 July; the next day they captured Palalahti crossroads just south of Lake Tulemäjärvi. Järvinen then proceeded to secure the rest of the area around the lake. On 19 July, Task Force Järvinen's main elements continued to advance south on the Kolatselkä–Vitele road. Three days later, on 22 July, his men captured the village of Suurmäki, leaving the road to Vitele village open from the north.

After the conquest of Salmi, the Finns immediately continued to advance towards the former border, despite their exhaustion. On the northern shore of Lake Ladoga, at Rajakontu, the Soviets had again prepared a line of fortified positions. These defences were eventually breached on 23 July by the Finnish artillery firing directly at the slits of the bunkers.

This finally enabled Talvela's VI Army Corps to pour across the former border towards Vitele village. There Lagus' 5th Division was able to join forces with the men of Task Force Järvinen advancing from the north. Their joint assault crushed the Soviet defences in the village on 24 July. On reaching the Soviet defences at the Tuulosjoki River, the Finns spread out immediately. From there the troops continued to march along the enemy lines all the way to Säntämä further east. However, entering the territory of the USSR did not sit well with all of the Finns, and in the end over 2,000 soldiers in total refused to cross the 1939 borders. (Kivimäki, 2013)

Despite Talvela's requests to proceed, Mannerheim ordered all attacks to be halted at this point. This decision was to cost the Finns dearly, as Talvela at the time tried to point out. Instead of attacking immediately to at least obtain a favourable bridgehead for future operations, the Finns now gave the sundered Red Army time to rally its troops and establish a determined defence. Furthermore, VI Army Corps was now forced to stand its ground, enduring repeated counter-attacks from Soviet forces for the remainder of July and August. The highly successful attack phase so far had cost Talvela 3,500 men, and these defensive efforts were to quickly double his losses.

The armoured train from the Railroad Anti-Aircraft Battery protecting the Finnish transport network in the direction of Loimola on 7 August 1941. The closest carriage is sporting a 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft cannon; other carriages hold Maxim machine guns. (Sa-Kuva)

(1896–1959)

RUBEN LAGUS
COLONEL
TASK FORCE LAGUS

As many other patriotic students did, Ernst Ruben Lagus returned with the main body of the Jäger from Germany to Vaasa on 25 February 1918. At the start of the Winter War, he became the quartermaster of the Army of the Isthmus; a challenging position since Finland lacked both sufficient weapons and ammunition. For a few days, Lagus held a front-line command with the 14th Infantry Regiment during the fierce defensive battles and retreat to the Interim Line.

During the assault phase of the Continuation War, Lagus became the commander of his own Task Force Lagus, incorporating the 1st Jäger Brigade, and was acclaimed for the bravery and determination shown by his men. Shortly afterwards, Talvela made him the commander of the 5th Division, but Mannerheim rescinded this order in favour of his own hand-picked man, Ilmari Karhu. Talvela conspired to delay the arrival of Karhu, and Lagus got a chance to prove his worth by leading his men past the former national borders to the Tuulos River.

To reward his actions, and to teach Talvela a small lesson, Lagus was made the first Knight of the Mannerheim Cross on 22 July 1941, ahead of his superior. In 1942, when the Armoured Division was formed, the 1st Jäger Brigade was incorporated into the unit, and Major-General Lagus was made the new commander. Under his tutelage, the unit grew to an independent and unusually effective and mobile tank unit. The formation employed its own artillery, as well as anti-tank and anti-aircraft support. During the defensive victory of Tali–Ihantala, the division was pivotal in stopping the Soviet offensive, giving everything on the field of battle.

Unlike other veteran formations, the Armoured Division took part in the Lapland War right up until December 1944. Lagus continued in active service until 1947, after which he resigned to follow a career in business.

The halt soon brought another concern to Talvela's attention. He realised that the Soviets now had a perfect opportunity to perform an amphibious landing across Lake Ladoga. Most of the army's reserves were now far to the front, and an attack directly towards Koirinoja or Pitkäranta could have had devastating consequences. While Talvela begged the high command to send in coastal defence troops, Heiskanen's and Lagus' men were given the role of patrolling the shores. The Soviets at least probed these defences, as this message from Lagus on 20 July shows: 'At Uuksalonpää one of our officers has fought off seven Russians, they retreated in front of his machine-pistol fire. They could be scouting for a landing site.'

In the end the Red Army never launched a decisive coastal strike acros Lake Ladoga, although Finnish troops did fire on vessels sailing past and had to repel several smaller operations. On 25 July, a passing fighter plane reported the following sighting from Lunkulansaari Island: '[The last] enemy landing attempt has been utterly smashed back, maybe 400–500 Russian corpses lie where they fell on the rocks and on the remains of their barges'. (Talvela, 1976)

Since Talvela's corps was performing so well, Karelian Army headquarters now re-established command over the German 163rd Infantry Division and all other available Finnish forces in their vicinity with new orders to push onwards to Suojärvi. On 29 July, the German attempt halted due to heavy losses, after all of its battalions had been repelled in their attempt to reach the village. By this stage, the Finnish high command had already decided to shift focus back to exploiting the breakthroughs achieved by VI Army Corps further south.

Similarly, the German flanking attack through the north towards Aittojoki was halted on 8 August. Further north still, Colonel Basil Fyodorov's 71st Rifle Division continued to cause significant losses among the Finnish troops assaulting its wilderness outposts on their way towards Porajärvi.

THE CAPTURE OF SORTAVALA

The 7th Division of VII Army Corps now turned towards Sortavala. This prevented the Soviets in the town from escaping north towards Ruskeala, which featured a second Soviet fortified line of defence just south of the Matkaselkä positions and where the Finnish 19th Division were being held firmly at bay. By 25 July, these Soviet forces had also been forced to retreat lest they end up in a large *motti*. Clearing Ruskeala now allowed the Finns to form a combined front against Sortavala.

After suffering defeats on both sides of Lake Jänisjärvi, the Red Army strengthened the defenders with the addition of Major-General Vladimir Kryukov's 198th Motorised Division. Kryukov's main mission was to perform a counter-attack towards the Jänisjoki River. On 28 July, disaster struck the Soviets; a car transporting the chief of staff of the 198th Motorised Division drove straight into the arms of the attacking Finnish forces. In the car the Finnish troops found the Soviet plans for a counter-offensive. The Red Army was planning to use the fresh 198th Motorised and the by-now battered 168th Rifle divisions to drive back the attackers. The plan seemed extraordinary to the Finns as it meant pushing all the newly arrived troops deep into a pocket lined with fresh Finnish forces. Even without access to these plans, it seems that Finnish forces would have easily been able to crush this Soviet counter-attack.

By 1 August, Kryukov's 198th Motorised Division was already in full retreat, while Colonel Andrew Bondarev's 168th Rifle Division remained to guard its rear by committing to delaying battles. The 168th's position was soon to become untenable as Mannerheim gave

(1892–1946)

ANTERO SVENSSON

MAJOR-GENERAL
7TH DIVISION

When the Extraordinary Autumn Manoeuvres began in 1939, Jäger Antero Johannes Svensson, commander of the Karelian Guards Regiment, was reassigned to lead the 2nd Brigade. Colonel Svensson was appointed to command the 12th Division on 1 February 1940. He served as the commander of the Savo–Karelia Military District during the Interim Peace, and took over his pre-assigned wartime post at the head of the 7th Division on 17 June 1941. At the start of the Summer War, he led the 7th Division's attack on the north side of Lake Ladoga. On 16 August 1941, Svensson won his Mannerheim Cross following the capture of Sortovala.

Svensson was promoted to the rank of major-general while temporarily holding the position of acting commander of VI Army Corps. He then returned to the 7th Division until 1 August 1943. From that date, he led V Army Corps until the unit's discharge on 5 December 1944.

Rautalahti Bay, the location of the Vesiperä *motti*. Here the retreating 168th Rifle Division encountered a quagmire which forced Colonel Bondarev to leave behind most of the unit's materiel, including their 76mm heavy anti-aircraft guns. In total the Finns gained 40 artillery pieces from the bay. (Sa-Kuva)

orders for the entire II Army Corps on the eastern Karelian Isthmus to join in the war.

By 7 August Blick's 2nd Division (II Army Corps) had reached Lahdenpohja harbour on Lake Ladoga. This cut off the Soviets engaged with VII Army Corps from their comrades on the Karelian Isthmus. When this element of the Red Army commenced its own retreat, it became the turn of Hannuksela's 19th Division to swing into attack. By 14 August, these men had destroyed the last Soviet forces left in the *motti*. Meanwhile the 7th Division continued its attack from the north, attempting to surround the town of Sortavala.

Finnish strategy, where possible, was to aim to attack from north to south, or ideally from north-west to south-east. This enabled them to advance along the multiple valleys, riverbeds and the extensive road networks built

between the long ridgelines running in this direction. Conversely, there were very few paths going from east to west through these hills, and attacking through terrain this way would have provided the Soviets with ridgeline after ridgeline to defend. Unfortunately, after the relatively quick start to the campaign, this is exactly what ended up happening, as west of the Jänisjoki River the Red Army had to be pushed back one defended hilltop at a time.

At this juncture Mannerheim decided to reorganise the command lines at the front. He started by forming a new I Army Corps under Colonel Einar Mäkinen. His corps initially contained the 2nd, 7th and 19th divisions fighting in the area. Under Mäkinen's command, these forces commenced a large pincer movement, aiming to surround Sortavala. The town fell to the Finns after one day of fighting on 15 August. Bondarev's 168th Rifle Division guarding the town was forced to retreat along the coast towards Rautalahti Bay. From there the majority of its troops managed to escape on barges to the large island of Valamo. Despite these efforts at the Rautalahti (*vesiperä* or 'wetlands') *motti* battles between 17 and 19 August, the Soviets left behind 1,200 dead, over 40 artillery pieces, eight tanks and over 300 trucks. To the Finns' dismay, however, the majority of the division, comprising some 9,000 men, had escaped. (Antila, 1993) According to 168th Rifle Division's records, between 22 June and 5 September the unit lost a total of 5,603 men.

In the end, with the help of 2nd Division from II Army Corps, VII Army Corps (now effectively renamed I Army Corps) succeeded in its objectives. In hindsight it seems that concentrating forces along the same path south of Pyhäjärvi that 2nd Division had used from the beginning would have led to the same result much more rapidly and with fewer losses. However, this may have negated the benefit of having the spearheads of VII and VI Army corps close together, which greatly increased their striking power and the certainty of results.

CHAPTER 4

ONSLAUGHT ON THE KARELIAN ISTHMUS

The Karelian Isthmus to the east of Imatra was the responsibility of Major-General Taavetti Laatikainen's II Army Corps. Although Laatikainen had been required to give up his 2nd Division for the push towards Sortavala, he chose to focus the remainder of II Army Corps on racing to reach the bend in the Vuoksi River before the Soviets, and then forcing the enemy gathered there up against the shores of Lake Ladoga. This primary task fell to Colonel Niilo Hersalo's 15th and Colonel Aaro Pajari's 18th divisions in the centre. To their rear, between these two commands, Mannerheim had granted the use of Colonel Johannes Sihvo's 10th Division as the reserve.

Against these men the Soviets pitted the 19th Rifle Corps under the recently appointed Major-General Philip Starikov, who took over from Lieutenant-General Michael Gerasimov

A group of 37mm Bofors anti-tank guns being transferred across Lake Kiiskisenjärvi at Simola. The numerous lakes and rivers provided ample practice for the men, but these transfers were still dreaded. Sometimes such fears even led to refusals, at least until sufficient artillery cover could be obtained. (Sa-Kuva)

A Finnish T-26 tank on loan to IV Army Corps at Kuurmanpohja just west of Enso. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

(now Twenty-Third Army commander). Following the withdrawal of 10th Mechanised Army Corps at the beginning of August, the 19th and 50th Rifle corps were the two remaining formations available to Gerasimov, whose Twenty-Third Army at this point fielded roughly 93,000 men – more than 20,000 short of its normal strength.

The 19th Rifle Corps included Kryukov's 198th Motorised Division (although most of its men were still tied down around Sortavala), Colonel Semjon Mikulski's 142nd Rifle Division and the 14th Motorised Rifle Regiment. These men were further reinforced by Major-General Alexander Kirzimov's 256th Rifle Division, arriving on 7 August – the last reserve unit available to the Soviet Northern Front. Further east, near Kirvu, Major-General Basil Konkov's 115th Rifle Division was in position.

The whole success of the Finnish attack on this front came to depend on the ability of Pajari's 18th Division to capture Ilmee village. As he lacked the numbers needed to comfortably accomplish all the tasks given to him, Pajari decided to risk everything on rapid success and left some 13km of front line with only a nominal guard. This was a considerable gamble as he was well aware of the strong mobile forces, including serveral tanks, opposing his troops there. On 31 July, both the 15th and 18th divisions were finally granted permission to start the attack.

RÄTTÖ THE KNIGHT

In his book *Marskin Ritarit*, Mauri Sariola records the story of Finland's first rank and file soldier to receive the highest military honour of the Mannerheim Cross:

> The Finns had encountered Soviet trenches which had to be reconnoitred first. While they scouted ahead and set up their artillery, the Russians made their own preparations. On the following morning the Soviet infantry and tanks launched a surprise counter-attack. While this assault was being repelled, a fateful grenade fell into a hastily built Finnish artillery dugout. The subsequent detonation killed all the officers and a few of the crewmen. When the survivors started to panic, the lightly wounded artilleryman Vilho Rättö commented, 'I think it will be all right somehow!'
>
> Soon a lieutenant of the infantry dashed over asking whether these men could operate an anti-tank gun, and if they could come and help with the menacing enemy tanks nearby … As the Finns' own weapon could not be repositioned, the officer proposed that they should see if any of the abandoned enemy guns could be made to work. Rättö volunteered to check things out …
>
> The 45mm gun the Russians had left behind was half buried in the soil. When it was uncovered, Rättö realised that the gun sights had been removed and that the locking mechanism was full of sand. However, after scrubbing the gun with a wad of grass he thought that it might yet work, and as luck would have it, the ground was strewn with suitable shells. The only thing that remained was to haul the gun over the little hillock, beyond which one could hear the sounds of several enemy tanks …
>
> Under the cover of the shrubbery the Finns pushed the gun to within 30m of the closest enemy tank. With the sights missing Rättö proceeded to barrel-aim the gun … fire … direct hit … The tank was soon burning … Now Rättö thought of a better way of aiming; while the lock was still open he could sight the enemy through the open barrel. Once the gun was in place, he only had to insert the shell and fire … the second tank was stopped in its tracks and immediately caught fire…
>
> Now a shell whistled past Rättö's own head. This had been fired by a third Soviet tank and still more were rolling this way … 'More shells,' screamed Rättö 'or they'll drive over us …' Recoil ... and the third tank was immobilised … it was time to relocate the gun …
>
> As soon as Rättö's crew reappeared, a fourth enemy tank opened fire driving straight at them … both sides lost sight of each other in the wooded area between their positions. However, this did not stop the exchange, as Rättö proceeded to fire in the direction where the sounds were coming from as fast as possible. After the fifth shot the engine sounds ceased and the Finns could hear Russian being spoken in speedy retreat. Rättö continued to shell in the direction of the sounds. Shortly after this Rättö hit the sixth enemy tank, at which point the area finally became quiet. 'Shall we go and wash our faces and get something to eat?' asked the lieutenant

Anti-tank gunner Vilho Rättö from the 27th Infantry Regiment. He was to be the first member of the rank and file to receive Finland's highest military honour by becoming the fourth Knight of the Mannerheim Cross, having destroyed several Soviet tanks with a captured 45mm anti-tank gun. (Sa-Kuva)

Finnish attack on the Karelian Isthmus

Finnish infantry crossing a river using an 'Iivar's Bridge', named after its inventor Captain Iivari Kauranen. The pioneers could quickly make these pontoon bridges by lashing together branches and planks of wood. (SA-Kuva)

The 18th Division fought its way forward one day at a time, finally clearing Ilmee village on 5 August. From there Pajari's left wing proceeded towards Kirvu until the spearhead was halted one morning by a sudden Soviet armour counter-attack. The battle seemed lost until anti-tank gunner Vilho Rättö saved the day for the Finns by destroying four tanks and damaging a further two with a captured enemy gun.

Pajari's right wing continued its relentless advance, applying pressure along the Vuoksi River. On 14 August, these men succeeded in pushing the Soviet forces across the river at Antrea. Instead of proceeding, however, Pajari decided to hold back from undoubtedly costly attempts to liberate Enso and Jääski, which were now to his rear. A week later the Soviets were forced to abandon these towns to avoid being surrounded by IV Army Corps.

Meanwhile, on II Army Corps' left flank, Hersalo's 15th Division had not fared nearly as well in the face of tenacious Soviet resistance. On 3 August, the division's exhausted frontal elements had finally advanced to Huiskunniemi, but there the attack stopped as a lack of roads prevented the artillery from reaching the front.

Eventually, the Soviets at Huiskunniemi were forced to retreat. The Finns were finally able to continue their advance, only to be halted again the next day, a mere 5km from their objectives at Hiitola. The whole division had been stretched into a long, string-like battle line at this point, and was only being tenuously supplied via the neighbouring 18th Division. Luckily

The landscape of eastern Karelia consisted mostly of dense forests or watery swamps, and in this region both the Soviet retreat and the Finnish advance were greatly hindered by the lack of decent roads. Here the men of the Armoured Battalion assist a Vickers tank stuck in a bog. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

the capture of Ilmee village and the subsequent victories along the length of Hersalo's line helped to keep 15th Division intact. These operations had, however, taken their toll, and the drained units had to be relieved in the vanguard by Sihvo's 10th Division.

A few days later the entire II Army Corps made progress, finally forcing the Soviets to renounce Hiitola village on 11 August. Following their defeat at Hiitola, the Soviet 142nd Rifle Division and the 198th Motorised Division escaped into the Kilpola archipelago. From there, the majority of the troops managed to be ferried south and into safety. The Finns subsequently captured the archipelago on 23 August, but by then the Soviet Navy had evacuated 26,000 men, 155 cannons, around 800 vehicles and over 5,000 horses. (Antila, 1993)

With the defeat of these two divisions, the Red Army's hold on the shores of Lake Ladoga was crumbling rapidly. On 21 August, forward elements of Sihvo's 10th Division liberated what little was left standing of the town of Käkisalmi. The rest of the 10th Division, meanwhile, engaged the freshly arrived Soviet 265th Rifle Division near the Räisälä crossroads.

A burning Soviet BT-5 tank. The image was taken during the action east of Palalahti on 5 August 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

It transpired that by 15 August, when the Soviet counter-attack had been repelled, the enemy troops in the area had already been surrounded in a *motti* at Räisälä. Over the next two days the Soviets were decimated and only a token force managed to escape across the Vuoksi River to safety. Thus the 265th Rifle Division ended up suffering the heaviest losses of any Soviet unit at this stage of the war. According to the report given by divisional commander Kirzimov a few days later, his unit had already lost 234 dead, 1,155 wounded and a staggering 4,830 missing. The latter had in most part drowned in the cold waters of the Vuoksi.

Now that the Finns were in control of the north-western edge of Lake Ladoga, they were able to release more troops from rear areas. This allowed a joint attack by the 10th and 15th divisions, which soon led to the capture of Kiviniemi. From there the Finns reached Taipale on 23 August. The monastery island of Konevitsa was liberated the following day.

It had taken the Finns only three weeks to reach the remains of the Mannerheim Line by the Vuoksi River, buoyed by knowledge of their numerical superiority and belief in their cause. The successes of the German

(1886–1954)

TAAVETTI 'PAPPA' LAATIKAINEN

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
II ARMY CORPS

Laatikainen worked as a grammar school teacher before the Civil War, and was forced to quickly leave the country after defending his students in a fight in 1915. Having escaped to Germany, he soon found his way into the Jäger training. Taavetti was somewhat older than his colleagues and soon received the nickname 'Pappa' ('Grandpa'). During the Civil War, Laatikainen took part in the fighting at Kelho, Sortovala and Viipuri.

In the Winter War, Laatikainen led I Army Corps, which was formed on 19 February from troops on the Karelian Isthmus. On the eve of the Continuation War, he took over command of II Army Corps. For his tireless and energetic leadership, which enabled many victories during the Finnish assault phase, Laatikainen received the Mannerheim Cross 2nd Class on 3 October 1941.

In 1942, his command was transformed into the Maaselkä Group which he continued to lead through the period of trench warfare. On 1 May 1944, Laatikainen was given command of IV Army Corps on the Karelian Isthmus. His troops were soon forced to give ground against the massed Soviet onslaught, but managed to finally stop the enemy at the VKT Line. Upon his retirement in 1948, Laatikainen was promoted to the rank of infantry general.

Army in the main theatre of war also helped to nurture a belief in victory and even gave rise to competitiveness among the rank and file. The Soviets had also fought valiantly, substituting their poor training with absolute ruthlessness. Where the Finns would often waste considerable resources to save even a single platoon, the Soviet officers were able to give orders requiring considerable personal sacrifice. What was even more astonishing was that these commands were most often obeyed, even in the face of certain defeat. Nevertheless, the Finnish advance – which lacked the air support, heavy artillery and armoured forces of Hitler's blitzkrieg – had been tremendously successful to this point.

While Lieutenant-General Karl Oesch's IV Army Corps was to remain in place along the pre-war trenches just north of Viipuri, Laatikainen's

II Army Corps was given orders to advance deeper along the Karelian Isthmus. Despite the fact that the majority of Laatikainen's corps were still engaged in clearing the eastern isthmus near Käkisalmi, the crossing of the Vuoksi River could not be delayed any longer – otherwise the Soviets would have time to bring in reinforcements from Viipuri, strengthening their positions along this wide and readily defendable river. The task for establishing the bridgehead for the rest of the corps to follow fell to Pajari's 18th Division. Under the cover of darkness on 17 August, the forward elements of the division crossed the river at Hopeasalmi. This was a risky manoeuvre, since the bulk of Pajari's forces were still tied up elsewhere. Luckily the enemy resistance they encountered was very light and the leading regiment created a solid bridgehead. The stage was now set for the II Army Corps attack to the rear of the Soviet defences at the western end of the isthmus. Reaching this milestone finally triggered Mannerheim's pre-war plan of activating Oesch's IV Army Corps. Oesch's attack was to begin in the Viipuri area on the western side of the isthmus.

(1894–1962)

KAARLO HEISKANEN
COLONEL
11TH DIVISION

Kaarlo Aleksanteri Heiskanen spent his Jäger years in a pioneer company, and after the Finnish Civil War worked as a junior officer in the Pioneer Battalion. By 1938, Colonel Heiskanen had risen to command the Tampere Regiment.

When the Winter War broke out, he took over the 17th Regiment from Paalu's 6th Division. In February 1940, Heiskanen's 7th Regiment (of the now renamed 3rd Division) was responsible for the desperate defence of the Summa village sector. In mid-February the whole regiment was first withdrawn from the front, and then together with the rest of the division, moved to defend Viipuri. When the war ended on 13 March 1940, Colonel Heiskanen had the honour of receiving the Finnish flag lowered from Viipuri Castle tower.

At the start of the Continuation War, Heiskanen led the 11th Division during its attacks towards Värtsilä and then further to the east. Heiskanen was made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross in 1941 as a reward for his outstanding leadership and the few casualties his command suffered.

He was promoted to major-general in 1942. During the Lapland War, his 11th Division continued to fight until the whole unit was finally discharged in November 1944.

Promoted to lieutenant-general in 1951 and to general of infantry in 1953, Heiskanen acted as the Commander-in-Chief of the Finnish Armed Forces between 1953 and 1959. He was the last Jäger to hold this position. Heiskanen took his own life when he became critically ill on 6 November 1962.

IV ARMY CORPS AT VIIPURI

The primary mission of Oesch's IV Army Corps was the liberation of Viipuri. Oesch's plan had been to surround and quickly recapture Finland's second largest city. However, the delays forced by the Finnish high command, and the events unfolding on the eastern isthmus, were to play a decisive part in the coming days. At Oesch's disposal were Colonel Einar Vihma's 12th Division, Major-General Bertell Winell's 8th Division, and a reinforced 25th Infantry Regiment. The 4th Division, led by Colonel Kaarlo Viljanen, formed the corps reserve in the rear.

OPPOSITE
On 31 August, the Finns were finally able to organise a victory parade in front of the Round Tower of Viipuri. Shortly after this, all the Finnish radio stations began playing a hectic *Säkkijärven*-polka non-stop for nearly two weeks. The people at the rear learned afterwards that the withdrawing Soviet troops had placed explosive charges all over the town, which could be detonated by radio signal. The fast-paced music playing on all frequencies was enough to disrupt these signals as the Finnish pioneers raced to defuse each bomb. (Sa-Kuva)

Following a failed counter-attack by the 123rd Rifle Division around Muolaanjärvi on 24 August, the 1st Leningrad Infantry Regiment had withdrawn south-east to protect the narrows between lakes Muolaanjärvi, Yksjärvi, Kirkkojärvi and Punnusjärvi. At the Muolaa *motti* two Soviet companies failed to flee in time. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

Due to the relative quiet on the Viipuri front, and the advance of the Wehrmacht across the Baltics, Stavka had ordered the transfer of the entire command staff of 50th Rifle Corps to the southern Leningrad Front on 21 July. At the same time all corps units on the Karelian Isthmus were placed directly under Twenty-Third Army's command. Unsurprisingly, the crossing of the Vuoksi River by the Finnish 18th Division caused great turmoil among the Red Army officers. The main body of Twenty-Third Army was still stationed deep behind Viipuri, and most of their reserves had been previously withdrawn to the opposite side of Leningrad. The Red Army had to react quickly to repel the Finns, or at the very least halt their advance. Otherwise, they would be forced to withdraw all their forces south of the river bend to avoid being surrounded and destroyed. To achieve this, Lieutenant-General Gerasimov was left with only the 43rd and 123rd Rifle divisions in the western isthmus.

As the pressure grew, no solution remained to the Soviets other than to retreat from the most vulnerable positions. Only minimal forces were left at Enso and Jääski, making them easy targets for the advancing Finns. The main garrison in these towns, namely Konkov's 115th Rifle Division, raced to intercept the oncoming Finns at the Vuoksi.

Unfortunately for IV Army Corps, headquarters held their reins too tightly and did not let it attack on Oesch's first request. On 21 August, he

Lagus' tanks and Jäger advancing from Tuulosjoki towards Syväri on 5 September 1941. (The Parola Armour Museum)

finally managed to convince Quartermaster General Aksel Airo to order an immediate pursuit of the Soviets if they showed any signs of departing their positions. Straight away Oesch gave instructions for aggressive reconnaissance of the enemy lines. When they saw the Soviet forces had started withdrawing, the Finns quickly turned their scouting into an all-out attack. As the Red Army had not been tied down along the front by either bombardments or assaults, as Oesch had originally intended, the Soviets managed to sneak away just before the Finns were ready to engage. This forced IV Army Corps into a speedy pursuit, trying to regain contact with the retreating enemy.

Meanwhile, 18th Division continued to widen the safe fording areas across the Vuoksi River. At the same time, Vihma's 12th Division and Colonel Matti Tiiainen's Light Brigade T continued to punch a hole into the Soviet flank. Light Brigade T was a task force comprising the 1st Jäger Battalion, two light detachments and two reinforced artillery companies.

(1892–1978)

LENNART OESCH
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
IV ARMY CORPS

Karl Lennart Oesch's parents emigrated from Switzerland in order to start their own dairy and cheese business. Lennart was studying mathematics at university when nationalistic fervour convinced him to join the *Pfadfinder* course of 1915. When the Jäger returned to Finland, Oesch was the first to receive the rank of captain.

During the Civil War, Oesch was sent to his childhood district of Sortovala to raise and train the VIII Jäger Battalion. During the fighting, his battalion mainly faced the regular forces of the Soviet Red Army. From 1924 to 1926, Oesch studied at the Military Academy in France. Upon his homecoming, he was promoted to the rank of colonel and ran the Finnish Military Academy for the next ten years. He was promoted to major-general in 1936.

At the start of Winter War, Oeach was made the chief of staff to Mannerheim's *Päämaja* headquarters, becoming the commander-in-chief's closest confidant. In February 1940, Oesch was quickly dispatched to lead the Coastal Group and repel the Soviet invaders that had gained a foothold on the northern shores of Viipuri Bay. He managed to halt the Red Army on that front.

At the onset of the Continuation War in summer 1941, Oesch led IV Army Corps on the Karelian Isthmus. His men liberated Viipuri and drove the Soviets back towards Leningrad. Once trench warfare set in, Oesch was promoted to lead Aunus Group on the Syväri front.

During the defensive battles, in order to streamline command structures, Mannerheim gave Oesch front-line responsibility for all troops on the Karelian Isthmus from 15 June 1944. His daunting task was to restore the men's fighting spirit while retreating to the final defensive lines and, once there, repelling the tidal wave of Soviet forces. On 26 June, Oesch was made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross, although he thought he should not receive this high honour before the fighting had ended.

On 19 July 1945, Oesch was charged with having given orders to execute any prisoners of war that resisted capture, and was sentenced to 12 years of hard labour. The Finnish High Court later changed this sentence upon appeal to three years' imprisonment.

After the war, Oesch became a writer and a long-time editor of the magazine *Kansa taisteli – miehet kertovat*, concentrating on recalling the events of the late war. Oesch was also a scholarly botanist with a keen eye for scientific detail.

(1893–1942)

KAARLO VILJANEN
COLONEL 4TH DIVISION

Kaarlo Ilmari Viljanen joined the Jäger training in 1916 and fought at the Misse River, Riga Bay and the Aa River. He was wounded lightly in the battle of Riga Bay. During the Civil War, Viljanen led a company of White Guards in several battles. He became a battalion commander in 1920 and a regimental adjutant in 1927. In 1933, Viljanen took on the training department for the Civil Guards' general staff.

In the Winter War, Viljanen operated as deputy commander of Task Force Pajari, and later led a battalion at the battles of Äglajärvi, Aittojoki River and Ilomantsi.

At the outset of the Continuation War, he assumed command of the 4th Division. Viljanen led his men into battles on the Karelian Isthmus and in eastern Karelia. He met his untimely demise whilst strolling with other officers straight into their own minefield on 24 February 1942. He was posthumously promoted to the rank of major-general.

A junior sergeant inspects the vehicles captured at the Porlammi *motti* on 5 September 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

By now the Red Army had escaped to a narrower part of the isthmus where the compressed front finally allowed them to bring their numbers to bear. The task of hurling the Finns back across the Vuoksi was left to two under-strength divisions. The counter-attack by Colonel Eugene Tsukanov's 123rd and Konkov's 115th Rifle divisions started on 24 August. The assault forced Light Brigade T to first halt its advance and then to retreat in places or to dig in to defend. Tiiainen's men eventually ended up immobilised and partially surrounded.

On 25 August, Tiiainen was killed during an enemy artillery barrage. Shortly after, the unit had to be relieved by the Finnish reserves and during the ensuing fierce firefight the Soviet attack in turn was stopped. Near Kämärä village an extremely accurate and timely artillery strike from the Finns again turned the tide and it was the Soviets' turn to retreat. The subsequent capture of Kämärä railway station severed the Viipuri–Leningrad tracks for good.

As early as 23 August, Mannerheim had given IV Army Corps orders to cut Viipuri's southern road network near Kuolemanjärvi and Uusikirkko. At the same time, II Army Corps was to strike directly south through the town of Kivennapa.

The IV Army Corps now consolidated its forces, while applying pressure on the defenders at Viipuri. Winell's 8th Division attacked from the north-west, while simultaneously attempting a landing just south of the city. Meanwhile, elements of Viljanen's 4th and Vihma's 12th divisions would proceed to surround the city from the east.

Fortunately for the Finns, it seems that the Soviets had put so much faith in their previous counter-attack that they had made no contingency plans for withdrawal from Viipuri city itself. This oversight could now enable the Finns to win a decisive victory; the only thing that was still needed were sufficient forces to actually surround the city.

The II Army Corps had reached their goals at Taipale on the eastern isthmus by 23 August, and could now release strong detachments to be transferred across the Vuoksi River. Further north, near Sortavala, the fighting had ceased and several divisions could now be redirected on command of the Finnish headquarters. Thus, in only a few days the troops needed for this vital opportunity would be in place.

On 24 August, 8th Division used assault and motor boats to cross Viipuri Bay at Lihaniemi Cape. The next day, Winell's men proceeded to capture Sommee station, thus permanently severing the Soviet escape route to the south. From there the bridgehead was soon expanded on a line stretching between Lihaniemi and Porlampi. Now only a small corridor south remained for the Red Army.

OPPOSITE
In preparation for the next stage of the attacks, the commander of the Karelian Army, Lieutenant-General Heinrichs, had set his men to improving the road network throughout the region. In many places the best option was to build log roads. The timber needed was plentifully available. (Sa-Kuva)

ABOVE
Soldiers displaying a map of the Soviet Union captured at the Porlampi *motti*. In the background is a T-37A amphibious tank. (Sa-Kuva)

ABOVE RIGHT
Major-General Vladimir Kirpichnikov with a packet of Chesterfield cigarettes at the Kyöliö officers' prison in November 1943. He was the only prisoner of general rank that the Finns captured during the wars. (Sa-Kuva)

Three days later, 12th Division captured Huumola and on 28 August, 4th Division occupied Säiniö village on the south-eastern edge of the city. The Soviet 43rd, 115th and 123rd Rifle divisions on the western isthmus had now been surrounded. Their retreat from the Viipuri area forced these disorganised troops to amass in a small *motti* around Sommee and Porlampi.

Ultimately, the majority of the Soviet 115th and 123rd Rifle divisions managed to make it through the forests towards Koivisto harbour. From there, they could use the still-open road to reach Leningrad. By 1 September, the bulk of the 43rd Rifle Division, including its commander Major-General Vladimir Kirpichnikov and all the heavy equipment had either surrendered or been destroyed in the Porlampi *motti*. This proved to be the largest cache of war materiel the Finns ever acquired – around 55 tanks, 300 tractors, 700 trucks, over 300 artillery pieces and 250 mortars. In addition, they had captured 270 machine guns and thousands of infantry weapons, while the army's munitions were improved dramatically by three million bullets. Luckily for the Finns both nations used the same calibre.

Viipuri was finally liberated on 29 August. Koivisto harbour was captured on 2 September, although the remnants of the three Soviet divisions continued to resist in the Koivisto archipelago until the beginning

(1897–1968)

CYRIL MERETSKOV
GENERAL
SEVENTH SEPARATE ARMY

After joining the Red Army in 1918, Cyril Afanasyevts Meretskov rose to lead the Leningrad Military District and therefore the whole invasion of Finland during the Winter War. Meretskov was demoted due to the appalling start of the campaign to lead the Seventh Army onto the Karelian Isthmus on 9 December 1939. The overall command of the war was then left directly in the hands of Stavka.

From the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, Meretskov worked as Stavka’s chosen man on the Northern and Karelian fronts. When the Finnish attack was steamrollering through Soviet Karelia, Meretskov was made commander of the Seventh Separate Army on 24 September 1941. Despite his last-ditch efforts, Petroskoi was soon to fall.

Meretskov then proceeded to lead the Fourth Army on the Olhava Front against the Germans. On 22 February 1944, he was given command of the Karelian Front. His troops stationed north of Lake Ladoga were to begin their attack ten days after the Leningrad Front attacked. In October, his army managed to capture Petsamo from the Germans. Elsewhere the Finnish lines held.

He was made a Marshal of the Soviet Union on 26 October 1944. In the spring of 1945, he transferred to command the front in the Far East, taking part in the war against Japan in Manchuria and northern Korea. After this, several senior military district commands followed, until he received the role of Inspector General in 1964. He died in service on 30 February 1968.

of November. Even then it was the Soviets themselves who decided to retreat, after realising that once the bay froze over, the Finns would be able to attack the islands from all directions.

While the battle for Viipuri was still ongoing, Mannerheim began to redeploy his forces on the Karelian Isthmus in preparation for a thrust over the former border. Elements of Oesch’s IV Army Corps were to attack along the western shores, while Laatikainen’s II Army Corps advanced in the centre. After the conquest of Sortavala, Mäkinen’s newly formed, three-division-strong I Army Corps had also been transferred to the area. They now took on the Soviets on the eastern side of the isthmus. These refocused Finnish forces succeeded in capturing the narrows between the lakes in the centre of the isthmus on 26 August.

The troops of II Army Corps were the first to reach the former border in the centre of the attack on 31 August, and on the western flank soon after. On the shores of Lake Ladoga, I Army Corps reached this objective on 2 September. In order to gain more advantageous defensive positions, their attack continued to Lake Lempaala.

Finns practising the use of a captured T-38 amphibious tank. (Sa-Kuva)

On 9 September, following strict orders from Mannerheim, the advance by Mäkinen's I Army Corps was halted just in front of the first defensive lines in the city of Leningrad. There, the front was to settle until the closing actions of the war in 1945. The Soviet fortifications had been meticulously prepared during peacetime, and were now heavily garrisoned, containing all the troops that had managed to flee from the isthmus.

Major-General Erwin Engelbrecht, commander of the German 163rd Infantry Division, smirking over the fallen Soviet bear. Engelbrecht had received the Iron Cross while leading the division during the occupation of Norway. This image was taken in 1942 before Engelbrecht moved to lead the Higher Command (*Höheres Kommando*) XXXIII in central Norway. (Sa-Kuva)

On the whole, the Soviets had been effectively led all along the isthmus and throughout their retreat. The only critical mistake they made was in leaving their troops to stew too long in the Viipuri area. This decision had directly contributed to the significant losses of equipment and men in the Porlampi *motti.*

The recapture of the Karelian Isthmus gave another great boost to national morale in Finland. The army's sense of superior quality grew, a feeling that had its foundations in what the troops saw as the miraculous victories achieved a year or so earlier during

The tanks of the Armoured Division were often forced to pull supply carts from the quagmires the roads had turned into. Now the assaulting Finns were faced with the same logistical problems that the Soviets had encountered whilst attacking Finland in 1939. This is a T-26A model, with two machine-gun turrets, operating near Syväri on the Paatusoja road. (Sa-Kuva)

the Winter War. In reality, the true strengths of the Soviet formations and the depth of their resilience were still mostly unknown to the Finns.

INVADING SOVIET KARELIA

During July, Talvela's VI Army Corps had quickly completed the mission given to it by the Karelian Army, first crossing the former border and then capturing the village of Vitele. Meanwhile, the rest of the army had fared less well. On Talvela's northern flank Group O had become bogged down in fierce fighting almost immediately, and on the right flank the VII Army Corps was to spend most of August clearing out the Sortavala area.[2] In the end Mannerheim ordered Talvela's attack to be halted along the enemy lines on the Tuulos River; now his VI Army Corps could only watch as the Soviets took this month-long respite to fortify and reinforce their positions.

2 After the formation of I Army Corps for the capture of Sortavala, the VII Army Corps headquarters had been transferred to Ladoga Karelia, where the VII Army Corps was re-formed from new divisions under Major-General Woldemar Hägglund.

Invading Soviet Karelia

Infantry advancing through a smoke screen. (Sa-Kuva)

Heinrichs, however, expected Mannerheim to allow his troops to continue the push eastwards soon. To this effect his units were replenished and equipment renewed. In order to secure supplies for operations deeper into enemy territory, the railways had to be quickly repaired and tracks laid as close to the front as possible. Roads had to be improved and destroyed bridges erected anew.

The left flank of the Karelian Army eventually received permission to begin seizing tactical jumping-off points for themselves. On 19 August, the troops of Group O and the 11th Division from VII Army Corps launched a joint operation to secure the Suojärvi area. By 21 August, Fyodorov's 71st Rifle Division had been forced to abandon the area and surrender the village of Suvilahti in the face of Finnish superior numbers.

On their way in from the south to Tsalkki village, Colonel Pietari Autti's 8th Infantry Regiment (from 11th Division) witnessed the following scene at the battle for Nälmäjoki:

> From the woods swarms of enemies poured onto the fields. The distance was only a few hundred metres. We did not open fire yet, but instead we let the enemy get closer. At a distance of 100 metres we began firing fiercely, the effects could be seen immediately. Once our mortars joined in, we could see that the enemy was diving for cover and did not know what to do. Eventually their officers returned some kind of order and the advance towards our lines continued. Our fire was murderous and there was no doubt how the battle would end. The Russians were dying in their droves, while the most daring maybe made it to 50 metres from us. Then the commander got hit and panic took over the attackers. In a rampaging mob they fled back towards their assembly areas flinging their weapons as they went. (Antila, 1993)

Finnish Vickers and T-26 tanks advancing towards Aunus on 5 September 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

From 6 to 7 September, Colonel Alexeyev's 3rd Rifle Division was routed at the battle for Nurmoila village. Despite the Soviets' strong defensive positon the three-pronged attack by superior Finnish forces proved too much. This image was taken a year later when Soviet incendiary bombs burned five homes to the ground. (Sa-Kuva)

After achieving a breakthrough at Nälmäjoki, the Finns captured Tsalkki village and crossroads on 23 August. With the left flank secure, VII Army Corps' centre breached the enemy lines between lakes Sotjärvi and Säämäjärvi, and by 1 September the Finns had proceeded to the eastern edge of both lakes and taken Säämäjärvi village.

Mannerheim finally gave orders for the Karelian Army's overall assault phase to begin on 4 September. The main goal was the distant Syväri River, on the southern edge of the isthmus, between lakes Ladoga and Ääninen. The intention was to simultaneously capture the city of Petroskoi and hammer all the enemy forces in the area against the shores of Ääninen. Mannerheim officially set the Karelian Army the following objectives:

1. VI Army Corps was to attack south-east to the Syväri River.
2. VII Army Corps was to first capture the vital crossroads at the village of Prääsä. From there the attack could proceed due east to Petroskoi city.
3. Group O on the left wing of the army was to reach the areas around the village of Munjärvi, north-west of Petroskoi.

The mission was expected to be even harder than the initial assault against the Soviet defences at the start of the war. The Finns did not have clear intelligence on the enemy positions and preparations similar to those carried out during peacetime were no longer possible. The situation was further complicated by the facts that the attack front was very wide, stretching for over 250km, and that any threat to the vital Murmansk railway could be expected to

PAAVO PAALU
MAJOR-GENERAL
18TH DIVISION

(1895–1971)

Paavo Johannes Paalu took part in the Winter War first as 6th Division (renamed 3rd Division in January) commander on the Karelian Ishtmus, and towards the end as leader of Task Force Paalu, repelling Soviet crossings over the frozen Viipuri Bay. During the Continuation War, Paalu's 1st Division was initially held in reserve but soon joined in to reinforce the attack towards Petroskoi. In 1942, Paalu was made commander of the 18th Division. His unit took part in the defence of the front line and VT Line as part of III Army Corps.

On 25 June, Soviet troops breached the VKT Line at Tali. As it happened, Paalu had been on the receiving end of a beating in the same area in 1918 when he was wounded leading his Jäger squadron. During the tense fighting of the Tali–Ihantala battles, Paalu failed to see eye to eye with Lagus. As a result, the commander of IV Corps, Taavetti Laatikainen, gave both the Armoured Division and 18th Division commands to Lagus and Paalu was recalled to headquarters for special assignments. Paalu resigned from the army in 1945 and became a tax inspector.

trigger Stavka into sending in all possible reinforcements to guard this lifeline.

Inconveniently for the Finns, German forces could not be relied upon to help. It was starting to become obvious that Army Command Norway would never achieve its objectives in the Murmansk region. In contrast, the Wehrmacht's attack to the south towards Leningrad had finally crossed the Narva River. This development helped the Finns by still tying up the majority of the Red Army in the defence of their former capital.

Heinrich's right wing, anchored on the shores of Lake Ladoga, was held up by Talvela's VI Army Corps. There Colonel Aarne Snellman's 17th Division and the 5th Division under Colonel Ilmari Karhu (whom Mannerheim preferred for this role, contrary to Talvela's opinion, over Lagus) had advanced into positions along the Tuulosjoki River. Task Force Lagus, mainly consisting of the mobile 1st Jäger Brigade and some elements of the 5th Division, remained as VI Corps' reserve. Lagus' orders were to take immediate advantage of any breakthrough the Finns could achieve. Gorelenko, the Soviet frontal commander, had split his Seventh Army into two command centres, each at slightly more than divisional strength: Petroskoi Operative Group led by Major-General Jacob Avvakumov, and Aunus Operative Group led by Lieutenant-General Vjatseslav Tsvetayev. Against VI Corps the Aunus Operative Group had positioned Colonel Zinovi Alexejev's 3rd Rifle Division, a recently arrived unit formed from volunteer Leningrad workers; the 3rd Naval Rifle Brigade was being held in reserve near the Syväri River. Stavka soon responded to the worsening situation, and sent over its reserve 314th Rifle Division led by Major-General Afanasy Semenkov.

The centre of the offensive, towards Lake Vieljärvi, was reserved for VII Army Corps' new units: Paalu's 1st Division and Heiskanen's 11th Division. Once the attack had started, Karelian Army headquarters dispatched Svensson's 7th Division to act as their reserve. Hägglund's path towards Petroskoi would be blocked by units from the Petroskoi Operative Group, namely Colonel Mitrofan Potapov's 272nd Rifle Division and (at the city) Major-General Antony Pavlovits' 313th Rifle Division.

BT-5 tanks from Lagus' armoured spearhead reached the shores of the Syväri River on 22 September. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

To the north, Oinonen's Group O, consisting of light formations, commanded the left wing of the attack. They were now reinforced with German troops comprising Lieutenant-General Erwin Engelbrecht's 163rd Infantry Division. Further north still, near Lake Porajärvi, volunteer troops led by Lieutenant-Colonel Eero Kuussaari had been assigned the call sign Task Force K, which roughly held brigade strength. These two northern formations faced the Soviet 71st Rifle Division, led by Colonel Michael Fedoseevich Pepalyayev.

As planned, the next stage of the operation was initiated by Talvela's VI Army Corps on 4 September. Their assault was preceded by the heaviest preparatory bombardment that the Karelian Army could muster, with 180 artillery pieces taking part. After five hours, the 5th Division broke through and crossed the Tuulos River. Once engineers had rapidly constructed a pontoon bridge, Lagus' mechanised Task Force L raced through the gap eastwards. The defending Soviet 3rd and 272nd Rifle divisions in the area had by now been reinforced with additional infantry regiments, artillery and armour. Despite their great numbers however, the Soviets were still forced to retreat.

Colonel Lagus used all available motor vehicles in the corps to throw his infantry regiment forward as rapidly as possible. On 5 September, the Jäger and a supporting light detachment broke the enemy defending the Aunus River. From there the main body, reinforced with tanks, stormed forwards. Talvela wrote in his memoirs:

An assault boat in use. The tired troops of Colonel Svensson's 7th Division initially failed to cross the river at Syvärinniska on 6 October. The next day these boats carried the brigade across. (Sa-Kuva)

> From my observation post I could clearly see across the river. This enabled me to perceive a unique historic event, where Finland's own armoured forces took part in fighting for the first time. They were advancing slowly and extremely carefully, stopping all the time and operating as mobile machine-gun emplacements. The enemy resistance was very light. From deep in the forest came the occasional sound of gunfire, so I figured that our attack was also moving in that direction. When the attack reached open ground around 08:00–09:00, it speeded up considerably. We could see clearly, just like on a board placed in front of us, how the Russians started to get out of their trenches … Once I could no longer see the tanks, I rode [my horse] back to the command centre at Keitoja. (Talvela, 1977)

The Finns seemed to become almost drunk with victory. One battalion after another continued to capture occupied villages and other Soviet positions, alone and without bothering to wait for any support to arrive.

At the large town of Aunus, the Soviets once more shifted to the defence and dug in. By now their forces consisted only of broken-up units. At 08:00 on 5 September, Frolov, the commander of the Karelian Front, had instructed the Seventh Army to keep hold of Aunus at all costs, and that fighting discipline had to be restored to the troops under Aunus Operative Group without mercy. (Kilin, 2007) That same night, the Finnish reserves reached the area and saw that the town was already in their compatriots' hands.

Further north, Nurmoila village had to be cleared of Soviet forces in order to protect the flank of Lagus' long spearhead moving towards Syväri. This task fell to the unengaged elements of the 5th and 17th divisions. On 6 September, the Finns attacked against the Soviets holding Nurmoila from three directions. Despite having superior numbers, the battle was not a foregone conclusion, as the narrows near the village provided Alexejev's 3rd Rifle Division with good natural defences. The Finnish regiment attacking from the south provided the solution. First, they managed to capture the Soviet supply formations and then cut the remaining road north-east towards

Saarimäki. This buoyed the rest of the 5th Division into action against the south-east corner of the village. Simultaneously, the forward elements of Snellman's 17th Division breached the enemy defences from the north, proceeding on the road towards the village. Their progress was finally halted by a fierce defence at the eastern edge of Lindojanjärvi Lake, one of the three small lakes located on the southern and eastern sides of Nurmoila. The main push from the north-west continued to make slow progress despite the heavy artillery bombardment employed. After the Finns finally broke through the Soviet lines in this sector, they counted 81 well-fortified dugouts.

Finnish troops admiring a captured Soviet locomotive. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

Now that Nurmoila was in Finnish hands, the Soviets tried a last desperate attack across the captured village. The timely arrival of Finnish reserves meant that they could not make much progress, and by sunset the remaining elements of the 3rd Rifle Division were forced to start retreating eastwards.

During 7 September, the Finns tried desperately to prevent the enemy from escaping this well-prepared trap. The fleeing Soviets had to abandon all their heavy equipment, which had become mired down along the soft shores of the nearby lakes. Eventually, 3rd Rifle Division headquarters and a strong infantry contingent managed to make their escape through the forested paths. This took the Finns by surprise and jeopardised the now exposed elements of Snellman's 17th Division.[3]

Secure in the knowledge that the 5th and 17th divisions were protecting their northern flank, Lagus' men progressed towards the Syväri River. The infantry unit in the vanguard was rotated out three times, as they faced a succession of new Soviet battalions rushed in to halt the Finns. On 7 September, the Jäger, supported by their few tanks, reached the Syväri River near the town of Lotinanpelto. It had taken them only three and a half days from the start of the attack at Tuulosjoki to reach this area, a fighting advance of over 80km. On the following day, a detachment from the 17th Division managed to cut the Murmansk railway near the town.

3 Colonel Aarne Snellman was mortally wounded in an air raid in Vaaseni on 12 April 1942. He was posthumously promoted to the rank of major-general.

In order to reach ideal defensive positions, Talvela ordered the capture of the railway bridge at Syväri. This was achieved on 13 September. By 22 September VI Army Corps had progressed south of Syväri, capturing Podporoze and Bulajeva and finally setting their lines at Jandebajoki, a small stream running almost 10km east of Syväri. The 5th Division took up position at the mouth of Syväri River, while the 17th Division remained south of the river maintaining the bridgehead. Thus the Finns had fulfilled the promises made to the Germans, and could now sit tight while they waited for Wehrmacht forces to reach this line.

The VI Army Corps attack was the first time the Finns employed their meagre armoured forces to full effect. Although this force mostly comprised obsolete or captured Soviet tanks, it helped to deliver the continuous pressure that Talvela's plans demanded. Holding the defensive positions along the Syväri River now presented VI Army Corps with an opportunity to surround one and a half divisions of Soviet trops north of Aunus. The plan was for both Finnish corps to proceed towards Petroskoi, with VII Army Corps pausing to occupy the village of Prääsä on their way.

Gaining favourable defensive positions along the Syväri River allowed the Finns to loop back north along the shores of Lake Ääninen towards Petroskoi. These fierce war dogs are guarding the Syväri front, in July 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

VII ARMY CORPS ADVANCES

Meanwhile to the north, on the Karelian Army's left flank, Group O had advanced along the Munjärvi road. They had reached the village of Onkamus by 25 August, and by looping through the vast backwoods swamps had managed to secure the bridge crossing at the Suunujoki River. At the beginning of September, a counter-attack by the Soviet 71st Rifle Division forced the Finns to retreat back to the Onkamus area. South of these men, Heiskanen's 11th Division had already paid dearly for penetrating the Soviet defences on the headlands between lakes Sotjärvi and Säämäjärvi.

There was to be no respite, as VII Army Corps headquarters now demanded more from its men. The 11th Division was to first capture the crossroads at Prääsä village and from there swing towards Pyhäjärvi village. Once at this designated area, they were to join forces with the 7th Division

from the left flank of VI Army Corps. Their combined goal would be to create a large *motti* of Soviet troops in the area. In the centre, the 1st Division was to proceed forwards with caution, in order to prevent the enemy from escaping westwards.

Initially 11th Division met fierce resistance on its path towards Prääsä. Heiskanen's nerve held and, attacking with conviction, he destroyed the Soviet forces piecemeal. First, Heiskanen stopped a counter-attack near Markkila village and then managed to clear the resulting *motti* by 2 September. From there Heiskanen's troops headed south-west across the dense forests, arriving in the rear of the Soviets guarding the bridge at Sänkäjoki, a northern tributary of Lake Vahatjärvi. The surprise appearance of Finns to their rear had such a tremendous effect that, despite possessing tanks, the Soviets could not break out; they were destroyed within a day.

A Vickers tank and a motorcycle messenger's equipment. After reaching Syväri, the Finnish tanks turned north-east for the shores of Lake Ääninen. Their role would be to prevent the Soviet armies at Petroskoi from escaping southwards. (Sa-Kuva)

On 5 September, the division captured Kinnas village and, importantly, an intact bridge over the Suojujoki River. In the battle for the village, the defending Soviet 163rd Rifle Regiment lost a great number of troops, including its commander and chief of staff. From there, the Finns continued their advance on Prääsä. The 11th Division's war diary recounts their progress:

> III-JR 50 [3rd Battalion of the 50th Infantry Regiment] arrived in the Daggilampi Pond area late in the afternoon. Soon they realised that the enemy had taken up position on the hill by the road about one kilometre ahead. After a couple of intense salvoes from the supporting artillery, the 3rd Battalion captured the hill in fierce combat. Now the road to Petroskoi had been severed. The battalion adopted defensive positions facing both north and south. During the evening the enemy tried to reopen the road several times. They were repelled each time and in the process two [Soviet] tanks were destroyed. Fierce fighting continued through the night. We can now start a coordinated attack against Prääsä from the north, west and south.

The victorious men of the Armoured Division at Petroskoi. (Sa-Kuva)

On 8 September, the Finns captured Prääsä and soon firmly held the critical crossroads. Lieutenant-Colonel Martti Aho's 50th Infantry Regiment, in the vanguard of the Finnish attack, lost five dead and 14 wounded in the capture of Prääsä, while the Soviets suffered 1,000 dead and 200 captured. From there the 11th Division could continue to help the 1st and 7th divisions with a southerly attack towards Lake Pyhäjärvi.

Whilst the battle for Prääsä was still underway, Paalu's 1st Division attacked eastwards on the south side of Lake Vahatjärvi. His forward elements had arrived in the area by 1 September, but were held back by the Soviet 9th and 24th Motorised Rifle regiments until 7 September. With the area secured, Paalu's regiments proceeded through difficult terrain due east towards the Nirkka crossroads (15km south-west on the Pyhjärvi–Saarimäki road), which was captured on 13 September. From Nirkka the 1st Division pressed on immediately, stopping in front of the Soviet defences on the south-western corner of Lake Pyhäjärvi the following day. By the evening of 16 September, the 1st Division had won their contest for these positions and had advanced to Simanisto village on the south side of the lake. They were soon to meet up with elements of VI Army Corps' 7th Division, which had looped behind the Soviets to attack in a north-westerly direction. A significant portion of the defending Soviet troops had been destroyed along the way, although the main body managed to escape being surrounded by withdrawing through the unguarded Pyhäjärvi headlands in the direction of Petroskoi. At Pyhäjärvi the Finns captured, among other equipment, several carloads of maps, a mobile printing press vehicle, a truck with filming equipment, several field hospitals and heaps of ammunition.

Meanwhile, Svensson's 7th Division (under the command of VI Army Corps) had begun their attack east from Lake Kotkatjärvi on 10 September. Three days later, the advancing Finns had captured the Lumatjärvi crossroads. On 14 September, Svensson's men celebrated the occupation of Kaskana. From there the 7th Division continued due east towards the town of Latva and Tarsepoli station on the Murmansk railway.

THE BATTLE FOR PETROSKOI

Petroskoi was the capital of Soviet Karelia. According to the census of 1939, it was a bustling rural centre of over 70,000 people. Due to its strategic location on the western point of Lake Ääninen, the city's capture was of great importance to the Finns. Stavka had realised early on that holding the city against determined invaders would cost them dearly. While the operation to clear the Red Army forces trapped in the Pyhäjärvi area was still ongoing, preparations for the capture of Petroskoi were already underway. Destroying the Soviet troops trapped between VI and VII Army corps was vital. By the middle of September, strong Finnish formations were approaching the city both from the south and west.

On 11 September, Mannerheim gave the Karelian Army its attack orders:

1. The attack which has been launched north-west of Ladoga must continue. I hereby name Petroskoi as the main objective for this attack.
2. For this purpose I have granted the use of the 4th Division and German 163rd Infantry Division to the Karelian Army commander.
3. I hereby order the Karelian Army to use a minimum of three divisions to attack Petroskoi from the west.
4. Considering the possible future use of the 163rd Infantry Division, I hereby order that the unit will be placed on the army's right flank. If possible in a bridgehead position south of the Syväri River.

On 1 October the Finnish vanguard reached the shores of Lake Solomanni along which the last remaining Soviet troops had escaped to the Grmovskoye Peninsula seen here on the opposite shore. In their haste to flee, some of their heavy weapons, including tanks, had been left behind. (Sa-Kuva)

The fourth point was part of a plan to let the German unit continue the attack from there to Leningrad. Engelbrecht, the 163rd's commander, later discussed further options for support and mutual attack with Talvela.

These new forces gave hope for the planned destruction of the Soviet forces trapped on this isthmus, although it still was not certain that all the amassed enemy units could be squeezed between and shattered by the VI and VII Army corps. There were simply too many open escape

Once the bustling frontier city of Petroskoi was in Finnish hands, the name was quickly changed to Äänislinna ('Castle by Lake Ääninen'). During the next few years Finns opened schools serving both the local population as well as the conquering soldiers. In addition to the institutions of higher education, the Finns also established prison camps in the city. This image was taken from the ski-jump tower, looking towards Lake Ääninen, on 17 October 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

Finnish troops crossing the Murmansk railway near Karhumäki. At least this part of the tracks leading south to Leningrad would remain severed. (Sa-Kuva)

routes available, and not enough time and men to achieve this goal. At the very least, the Finnish divisions would be able to achieve a unified front prior to launching a concentrated attack towards Petroskoi. The wider the front that the Finns could achieve, the better; this way the numerically inferior Soviets were very unlikely to be able to prevent a decisive breakthrough. Everything was to be ready for the mission to start on 16 September.

Heinrich's plan called for Lagus' 1st Jäger Brigade and armoured forces to travel from Syväri in the south to the area, either through Prääsä or Latva villages. However, they ended up being delayed as the autumn rains had now turned these roads into veritable quagmires, considerably slowing the manoeuvre.

Talvela's diary recorded the following conversation about trying to solve Lagus' transport issues: 'Lagus asked whether we could use prisoners of war to tow the vehicles. I pointed out the difficulties that he would have in guarding and keeping these prisoners supplied. However, I gave a positive answer when he asked whether he would be allowed to make forceful acquisitions'. (Talvela, 1977) Taking property from locals even in former Soviet territory was a court-martial offence, unless specifically given permission to do so.

To the south of Petroskoi, Svensson's 7th Division was to join the attack with the majority of its forces from the south in the Latva area. Level with the city itself, Heiskanen's 11th Division would advance due east from the northern edge of Lake Prääsäjärvi. On their left flank, the spearhead's northernmost unit, Viljanen's 4th Division, was to attack straight through the dense forests. Meanwhile, Paalu's 1st Division was to finish clearing the Prääsä area of Soviet troops, before forming a task force as the main attack's reserve.

As the 4th Division attacked along the Säämäjärvi road, it ended up in fierce battles around Villavaara railway station. This engagement was effectively won by the early action of Major Luukko's 1st Battalion, which started the attack by crossing the railway and severing the road on 14 September. Some smaller groups of Soviet troops did manage to escape through the dense foliage, using the narrow channels between the attacking formations. In the meantime, the Finns succeeded in capturing elements of several different regiments of the 313th Rifle Division, and taking approximately 500 prisoners. At the *motti,* the Soviet dead numbered nearly 2,000. Viljanen's men also captured some Soviet guns that were immediately set to defend the roadblock. These were used for direct fire by the infantry and helped greatly in repelling the repeated Red Army counter-attacks from the east.

The next stage was an operation to clear out the smaller *motti* that had developed in the area, some of which held out until 26 September. While advancing, Viljanen's men had succeeded in tying down significant numbers of Soviet forces, destroying them in part and capturing many spoils. Viljanen's troop proceeded to capture Markkila crossroads after three days of heavy fighting, on 19 September.

From Markkila, the 4th Division continue to advance due east with the intention of cutting the Soviet escape route from Petroskoi to the north. The division encountered fierce resistance from the Soviet 313th Rifle Division at the narrows between the smaller lakes and shores of Ääninen. The left flank of the enemy was strongly defended, but on the right Viljanen's regiments managed to gain some ground. The attack halted at the strongly defended village of Viitana.

On 28 September, Viljanen's troop fought through to the western side of the village where, upon reaching the defensible river crossing, the attack again ground to a stop. In the end, Viljanen's force was not able to reach the shores of Lake Ääninen, some 10km distant, before Petroskoi fell. However, Viljanen's efforts helped to protect the northern flank of the 11th Division. This allowed Heiskanen to risk a flanking manoeuvre that opened the road to the city.

Heiskanen's troops were facing Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Derzavin's 37th Rifle Division. On 14 September, Karelian Front headquarters had

given orders for Avvakumov to begin forming the new 37th Rifle Division from troops available in his command. On 26 September, Cyril Meretskov (who had replaced Gorelenko as Seventh Army commander) formed several temporary units for the defence of Petroskoi. As part of this process, Avvakumov was demoted to lead the 1st Light Brigade.

Heiskanen's manoeuvre began with his troops advancing first to Polovina (Puoliväli) village on 24 September, and pressing on to the Vilga crossroads by 28 September. The VII Army Corps had already reached the area 6km west of Petroskoi's suburbs, and Paalu's 1st Division finally arrived at Lake Lohijärvi on 26 September – too late to help in the battle for Petroskoi.

The Soviet troops in the city feared that they had now become cut off from the south. On 21 September, Major Jouko Hynninen from Lagus' 1st Jäger Brigade gave up waiting for the main body of the unit, which was still delayed by the muddy roads. He proceeded to capture Latva village with the forces he had at hand. This surprise attack greatly shook the Soviet defenders' morale. Just two days later, Hynninen was able to join forces with the troops of Svensson's 7th Division just north of Tarsepoli village. Here the 7th Division had been battling the remnants of the Soviet 3rd Rifle Division which had originally escaped from the Nurmoila *motti*. The official Finnish war diary states: 'The Finnish troops chased the enemy ceaselessly, fighting continuous skirmishes with their rearguards. The pursuit was so fast that the enemy did not dare to stop its flight for long. From the Taipale [battleground] onwards the war materials left behind, the equipment and the fatigued men and animals, acted as road signs for the Finnish troops. On its way the 2nd Battalion of the 30th Regiment captured many prisoners of war.'

By now, Lagus had sent all the reinforcements he could free up for the front. With their help, the 1st Jäger Brigade, advancing along the Ääninen coastal road, captured Petäjäselkä village crossroads on 23 September. This ultimately cut off the Red Army's final escape route to the south. Tank ace Reino Lehväslaiho recalled the fighting that led up to this moment in his book *Panssarisotaa*:

> The enemy in the *motti* started to retreat, the tanks were immediately thrown into pursuit. At the same time the enemy made their own attack at Derevjannoje village [Puujoki] … tanks led the way with infantry advancing in their wake. This was too much for our rearguard who after taking casualties withdrew from the village. Our own tanks fought to open the road to the right and rushed in to help. The leading tank drove to a corner of a house, only its barrel was visible pointing along the road. The enemy's Christie [BT] tanks made a rapid attack. Distance to the leading tank was only 100m

> … 50m … 30m … 20m. The nerves of the gunner waiting behind the corner held. He pressed the firing pedal. The shell shot out angrily and hit the enemy tank squarely in the turret. The tank was immediately ablaze. The rest of the enemy tanks turned around. This invigorated our Jäger, and our attack was again rolling forward. Soon the village was recaptured, and our tanks were set to secure the perimeter. (Lehväslaiho, 1958)

During its advance, the 11th Division had inflicted significant losses on the Soviets at both Polovina and Vilga. This was achieved by intrepidly circling through the virgin forests to surprise the enemy from the rear. On 27 September Meretskov informed Stalin of a new Seventh Army operation to defeat the attacking Finnish forces: all available units had been withdrawn into a 55km-long front that was 17,800 strong – although only 9,000 of these were combat fit. The northernmost part (and the only avenue of escape the Soviets had open to them) was reserved for the 313st Rifle Division, and the centre was held by the 37th Rifle Division. Avvakumov's 1st Light Brigade and the 272nd Rifle Division (retreating to the area from Pyhäjärvi) were to hold the south side of the city. The weakest of the formations – the 800 men left of the volunteers of the 3rd Rifle Division – were tasked with holding the western edge of the city. The Soviet Air Forces were able to allocate 57 airplanes in support of this operation.

Despite Meretskov's renewed efforts, 11th Division managed to advance along the road in the Sollusmäki area to the north-west corner of the city by 1 October. The exhausted division did not quite have the time and energy left for an immediate push forward to the Solomanni peninsula road. Consequently, some of the Soviet troops used this route to escape their ruin. Soon afterwards, the Red Army's bridgehead on the shores of Solomanni was broken and the defenders along with their equipment, including several tanks, were captured.

Later on the same day, the 1st Division finally conquered the city of Petroskoi. The city itself was only lightly defended as most of the critical equipment, manufacturing machinery and commanders had already been evacuated. After the city centre fell, the Soviet resistance also broke down south on Lagus' front. This newly captured prize was immediately renamed Äänislinna by the Finns.

It transpired that the large Soviet reinforcements the Finns feared had never been sent to Petroskoi's defence. Perhaps Stavka considered this city a secondary priority after all, while the remaining branch of the Murmansk railway was still operational from the shores of the White Sea to the nation's interior. Certainly plans for abandoning the city had already been laid down earlier in the summer, just in case the Finns ever made it this far east.

Young men of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Army. The speed and aggression with which the Finnish forces had advanced through Soviet Karelia had taken Stavka by surprise. Although gangs of fortification troops worked ceaselessly behind the shifting front line, young men like these two were considered the most plentiful and expendable of resources. (Sa-Kuva)

Overall, the Soviet tactics had been to retreat from one line of defence to another, while inflicting the greatest possible rate of attrition on their enemies. To this effect, very strong engineer and fortification troops had to constantly, and in accordance with well-prepared plans, operate behind the ever-moving front line.

The following day, in order to secure their victory at Petroskoi, the 1st Division continued through the northern part of the city, crossing the Solomanni Peninsula. At the same time, elements of Viljanen's 4th Division broke through the narrows of the Suojunjoki River and Lake Urjärvi, reaching the bridge at Besovets village.

Äänislinna was now firmly in Finnish hands. On 27 October, the coastal defences in the area were handed over to the newly formed Äänisjärvi Coastal Brigade, led by Colonel Eino Järvinen.

On the southern front, while part of the 7th Division was tied down in fighting around Petroskoi, Svensson sent a detachment to ford the river at Syvärinniska. The first attempts made on 6 October failed due to fatigue and the men's refusal to cross the river. The following day, after all the available artillery batteries had created a smokescreen, assault boats and barges carried the infantry brigade across the river. They quickly gained a foothold, largely thanks to light enemy resistance. After this the remainder of the division arrived and the forces were able to merge at the bridgehead south of the river.

They now planned to continue in a two-pronged attack in order to occupy the ideal defensive grounds from the Lake Orensenskoje narrows to the town of Oshta. On 14 October, Svensson's troops encountered the

OPPOSITE
Urban fighting in the centre of Karhumäki on 5 December 1941. Major-General Laatikainen's II Army Corps' three-pronged attack was successful in capturing the town. This formed a key anchor point of the third line of defence on the isthmus between lakes Seesjärvi and Ääninen. (Sa-Kuva)

vanguard of Colonel Michael Panfilovits' 114th Rifle Division which had just transferred in from Siberia. Fierce battles ensued well into the next year, and yet in the end there was no clear outcome. The Finns could not reach the desired positions, but managed to hold firm in front of all the Soviet breakthrough attempts. Consequently, the defensive line ended up being formed closer to the Syväri than originally planned, between lakes Kimjärvi and Särkijärvi. These positions were to remain more or less unchanged until the summer of 1944.

THE THIRD LINE OF DEFENCE

On the far northern flank of the Karelian Army, the capture of Petroskoi had now freed Group O to progress from the Onkamus line. Their advance led to several wilderness skirmishes where Oinonen's men repeatedly defeated Pepalyayev's 71st Rifle Division. At the beginning of October Oinonen's command was heavily reinforced and tasked with a new goal of securing the Munjärvi area. The Finnish attack quickly led to the creation of a strong *motti*. Soon after, the defending Soviet commanders were given permission to break out and the troops that were left behind started to disperse. This led to the fall of Munjärvi village on 7 October. By 19 October, Group O had reached all its objectives and started to prepare for the next stage of the attack.

Finnish T-28 tanks in the centre of Karhumäki on Finnish Independence Day, 6 December 1941. Over the next few months the Finns repelled several Soviet counter-attacks attempting to liberate the town. (Sa-Kuva)

Pushing the front deeper into the Soviet Union, the Tank Battalion´s Vickers and T-26 tanks advance with the men of the 1st Jäger Regiment at Lumbus, just north-east of Karhumäki, in December 1941. (Sa-Kuva)

On 7 October, President Risto Ryti, Prime Minister Johan Rangell and Minister of Defence Rudolf Walden visited Army Headquarters in Mikkeli to award Finland's commander-in-chief Mannerheim with the Mannerheim Cross 1st Class (the first of its kind), as well as the Mannerheim Cross 2nd Class (the 18th to be awarded so far).

The fleeing Soviets only had time to torch a few of the hundred or so houses at Paatane village on the western shores of Lake Seesjärvi. A soldier erects the Finnish war flag on the apex of the highest building. (Sa-Kuva)

In order to stabilise the nation's living space, on 6 November Mannerheim outlined a plan to form a third line of defence on the Maaselkä Isthmus stretching between lakes Seesjärvi and Ääninen. This was to be achieved with simultaneous attacks from both the south and west.

The town of Karhumäki at the northernmost corner of Lake Ääninen was the natural strongpoint in the area. There the troops could establish a robust anchor point when they started building the defensive fortifications facing east. As ordered, VII Army Corps started its advance from Äänislinna through the terrain dotted with lakes and narrows. In order to continue progressing parallel to the Murmansk railway, they were repeatedly forced

to make diversions, looping around the smaller lakes and isthmuses.

For the attack Mannerheim ordered the formation of a new II Army Corps from the troops on the left flank of the Karelian Army. This command was given to Major-General Taavetti Laatikainen and included the 4th Division, Group O, Brigade K and the 8th Division, which was currently being transferred in from the Karelian Isthmus.

Once the Finnish vanguard had reached the town of Poventsa, the Soviets blew the locks of the Stalin Canal, flooding the city. Due to propaganda from both sides, it is unclear how much damage this caused to the advancing troops, although at least some heavy equipment and a few lives were lost. What the Soviets did not know was that Mannerheim had already given orders for the advance to halt here. In this image, a Finnish tank guards the front while a makeshift rope bridge provides infantry access through the window. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

Against them the Soviets set Major-General Michael Knyazev's Karhumäki Operative Group, consisting of the 37th, 71st and the 313th Rifle divisions. All three were under strength, but this still left Knyazev with 46,679 men. In addition to these troops, Colonel Nicholas Tsernuha's 289th Rifle Division was operating in the Seesjärvi area directly under the Karelian Front's command. (Between March 1942 and June 1944 the unit was temporarily led by the Viipuri-born Toivo Tommola.) Stavka had given orders to 'categorically hold Karhumäki!' As part of the plan allowed for the relinquishing of the town of Kontupohja further south, the Finns were allowed to occupy it without a fight on 2 November.

Meanwhile, the strongest element of Laatikainen's force advanced along the Juustjärvi–Mäntyselkä road towards Karhumäki, while a lighter detachment took the road from Porajärvi north to Paatene, reaching the western end of Lake Seesjärvi.

Everything was progressing according to plan. On the north side of Paatene, II Army Corps made contact with Raappana's 14th Division, which had been the first to cross into the Soviet Union at the war's outset. Meanwhile, Laatikainen's vanguard pushed forward first to Karjalan Maaselkä, and then to Suurlahti village on 23 November. Soviet forces were caught temporarily in a *motti* at Liistepohja, but escaped over the first ice forming on Lake Seesjärvi. The Finns now held the northern edge of their desired line by the shores of the lake. The town of Karhumäki at the other end of the narrow isthmus was then captured by a three-pronged attack on 5 December. The following day the eager Finns pushed forward towards Poventsa village, at the bottom end of the Stalin Canal.

Once Poventsa was firmly in Finnish hands, the Red Army desperately tried to halt the enemy's advance by blowing up the locks on the Stalin Canal on 8 December. This caused the Poventsa River to overflow, and a 3m-high

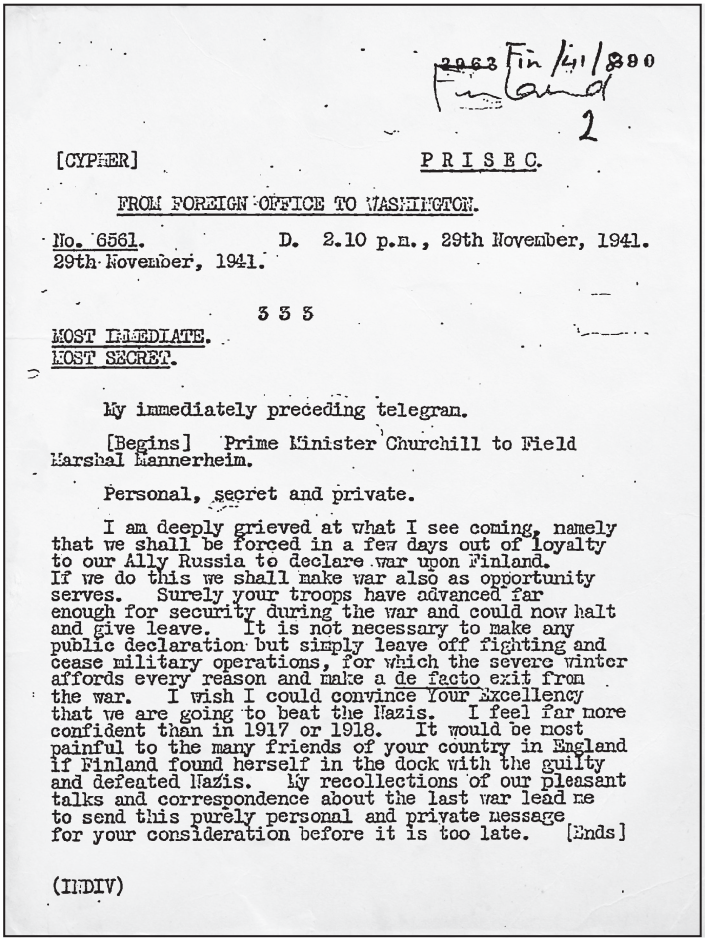
tidal wave rushed through the village. The surging waters took a few of the Finnish soldiers with them and even uprooted some of the houses. In the end the damage remained largely superficial and was more of a nuisance than a deterrent. Unbeknownst to the Soviet commanders, Mannerheim had already given orders that on 7 December, the army should halt and take up forward defensive positions on the Poventsa–Voljärvi–Hiisjärvi line. This concluded the Finnish attacks on the Maaselkä Isthmus. Over the next few months the Soviets launched strong counter-attacks in order to recapture Karhumäki. All of these efforts failed.

BELOW & OPPOSITE
Before committing his country to war against Finland, Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent Marshal Mannerheim a secret and personal missive. Copies of this correspondence were shared by the British Foreign Office with Washington. The original telegrams are held at the Imperial War Museum, UK. On Finnish Independence Day, 6 December 1941, Britain finally acquiesced to the Soviet demands and declared war.

POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS DURING THE ASSAULT PHASE

The Finns strongly believed that the current conflict was a natural extension of the Winter War, and that it was a separate affair to the one fought by the Germans. They worked hard to convince all those who would listen that Germany was merely a co-belligerent nation with a mutual enemy. This argument was somewhat tenuous, as in some areas their cooperation had developed into a very close partnership – as clearly demonstrated by the loan of III Army Corps for Operation *Silberfuchs*. While northern Finland was continuously manned and defended by German forces, there would not be much room for politicking. In truth, the Finnish situation was fundamentally different to those of the Axis Powers and their satellite states. From the very beginning the Finns had maintained with each communication that this was a separate war, and although the Allies did not buy into this idea, the Germans could not force the matter either.

When the tides of war then started to ebb, making the Finns tie themselves formally to the Axis became imperative for Hitler. Otherwise they would set a bad example to central European states.



Fin/41/890
Finland
2

[CYPHER] PRISEC.

FROM FOREIGN OFFICE TO WASHINGTON.

No. 6561. D. 2.10 p.m., 29th November, 1941.
29th November, 1941.

3 3 5

MOST IMMEDIATE.
MOST SECRET.

My immediately preceding telegram.

[Begins] Prime Minister Churchill to Field Marshal Mannerheim.

Personal, secret and private.

I am deeply grieved at what I see coming, namely that we shall be forced in a few days out of loyalty to our Ally Russia to declare war upon Finland. If we do this we shall make war also as opportunity serves. Surely your troops have advanced far enough for security during the war and could now halt and give leave. It is not necessary to make any public declaration but simply leave off fighting and cease military operations, for which the severe winter affords every reason and make a de facto exit from the war. I wish I could convince Your Excellency that we are going to beat the Nazis. I feel far more confident than in 1917 or 1918. It would be most painful to the many friends of your country in England if Finland found herself in the dock with the guilty and defeated Nazis. My recollections of our pleasant talks and correspondence about the last war lead me to send this purely personal and private message for your consideration before it is too late. [Ends]

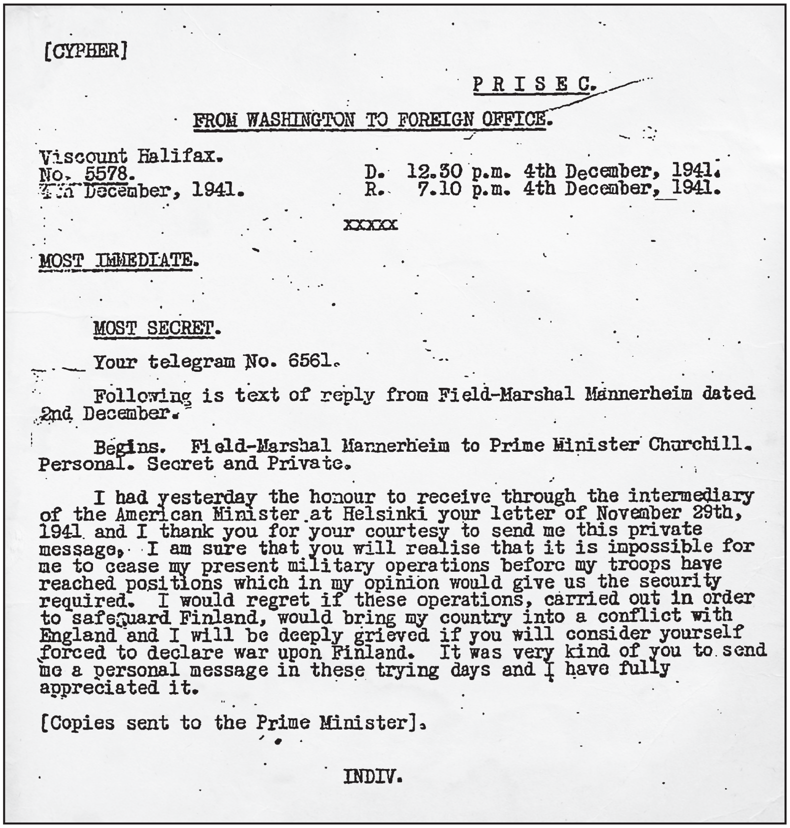
(INDIV)

After the relationship between Finland and Britain had soured, it was the turn of the United States to see if the fighting could be paused or ideally the war brought to a complete stop. Just after the Continuation War had broken out, both the US and Britain had demanded that Finland should not continue to attack beyond the former borders. Mannerheim regretfully declined this advice for tactical reasons. As the Finnish attack was steamrollering towards these limits, the two nations started actively seeking a way to remove Finland from the war.

Towards the end of the year, the US requested that Finland give satisfactory guarantees that they were to cease all attacks against the Soviet Union, and moreover that their forces would start withdrawing rapidly to the borders of 1939. The Finns gave a detailed response explaining that since 1939, the country had only been fighting the same defensive war. So far, they had not received any peace offer whatsoever, and retreating from the current defensive positions would dangerously weaken their nation. Furthermore, they could not see any reason why the distant United States should feel threatened by Finland's actions.

Before the war, the Soviet Union had burned many political bridges with its actions in Finland and the Baltics. Now, near the end of 1941, Finland's foreign relations were so inflamed that each further concession to the Germans also eroded their position. Despite this, some grains of goodwill still remained. Because of these sentiments, it took repeated attempts by the Soviet ambassadors to receive a response to their official requests that Great Britain should finally declare war against Finland.

On 6 December 1941, the Finnish parliament declared that all the areas lost in the Moscow Peace had now been returned to the fold of the nation. On the same day, Great Britain finally declared war on Finland.



[CYPHER]

P R I S E C.

FROM WASHINGTON TO FOREIGN OFFICE.

Viscount Halifax.
No. 5578.
4th December, 1941.

D. 12.30 p.m. 4th December, 1941.
R. 7.10 p.m. 4th December, 1941.

XXXXX

MOST IMMEDIATE.

MOST SECRET.

Your telegram No. 6561.

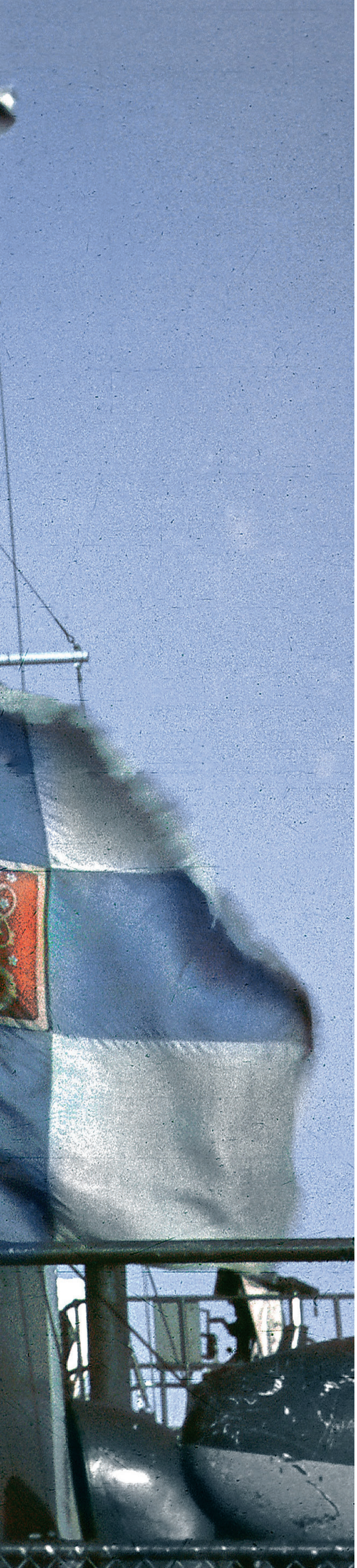
Following is text of reply from Field-Marshal Mannerheim dated 2nd December.

Begins. Field-Marshal Mannerheim to Prime Minister Churchill. Personal. Secret and Private.

I had yesterday the honour to receive through the intermediary of the American Minister at Helsinki your letter of November 29th, 1941 and I thank you for your courtesy to send me this private message. I am sure that you will realise that it is impossible for me to cease my present military operations before my troops have reached positions which in my opinion would give us the security required. I would regret if these operations, carried out in order to safeguard Finland, would bring my country into a conflict with England and I will be deeply grieved if you will consider yourself forced to declare war upon Finland. It was very kind of you to send me a personal message in these trying days and I have fully appreciated it.

[Copies sent to the Prime Minister].

INDIV.

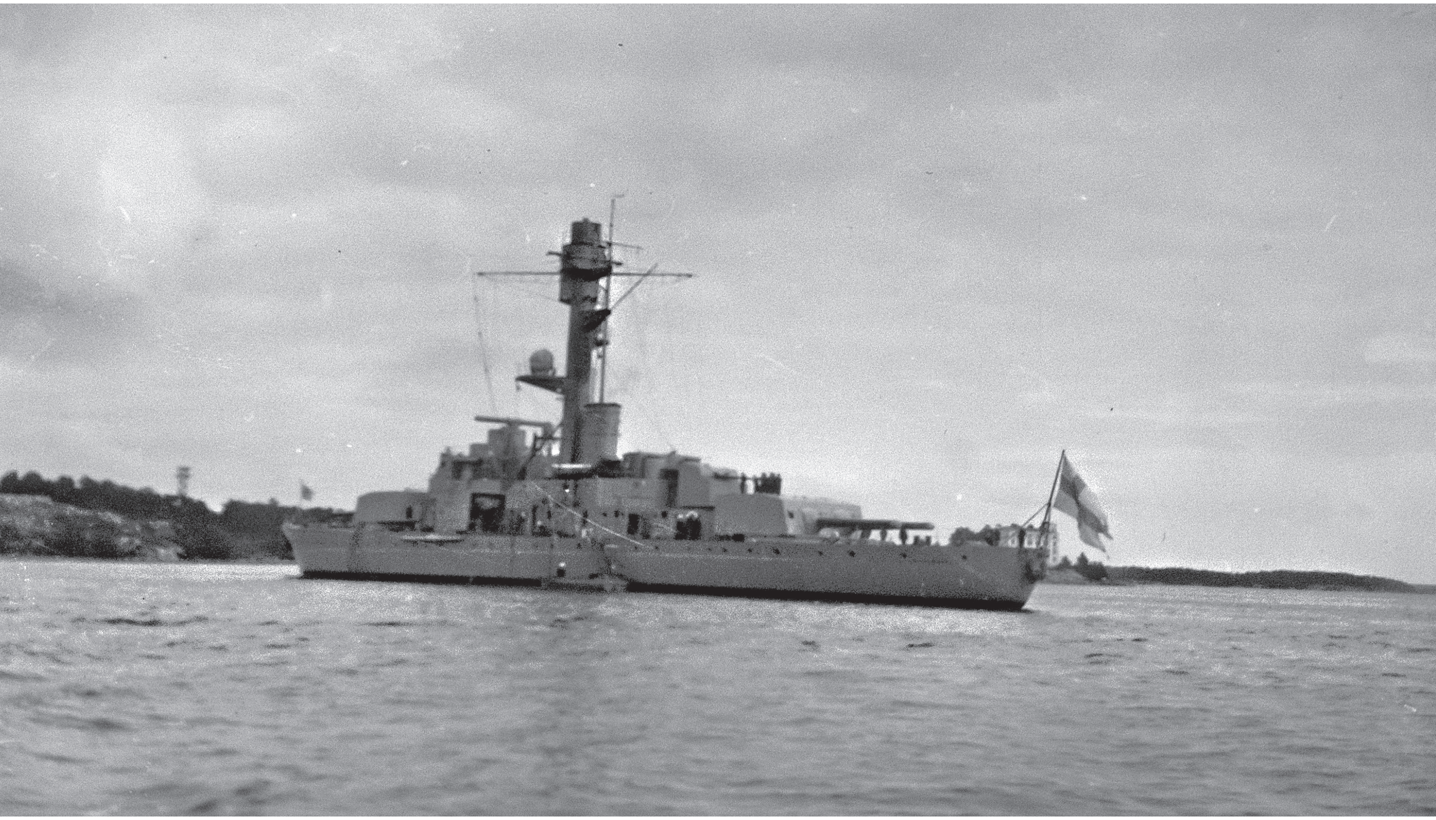


CHAPTER 5
THE FINNISH NAVY AND HANKO

At the start of the Continuation War, the Kriegsmarine and Luftwaffe were crucial in restricting the threat posed by the Red Fleet in the Baltic Sea. This made the task of the Finnish Coastal Defence Forces considerably easier. Protecting commercial traffic was left mostly to the Kriegsmarine. When the conflict began, the Soviets had laid a minefield across the mouth of the Gulf of Finland, in order to prevent the Germans from reaching the seas around Leningrad. The minefield stretched from Hanko harbour, and effectively split the Finnish naval defences in two. To the west side of this line, the Germans laid down their own blockade in order to prevent the Soviets from leaving the gulf.

Practically, this meant that the Finns took control of the seas east of the minefields and the Germans those to the west. In the autumn of 1941, once the Wehrmacht had reached Estonia

A Bofors anti-aircraft gun on the minelayer *Ruotsinsalmi*. Due to Soviet dominance of the Gulf of Finland and their strong presence at the leased Hanko naval base, the Finnish Navy's operations were severely limited at the start of Continuation War. When the German advance progressed and the Finns captured strategically important islands on the gulf, the situation was reversed and the Red Fleet became bottled up near Leningrad. (SA-Kuva)



The ships *Ilmarinen* and *Väinämöinen* were the pride of the Finnish Navy. Both vessels featured the latest technology, and had advanced firing controls.
Length: 93m
Beam: 16.9m
Draught: 4.5m
Displacement: 3900t
Top speed: 15 knots
Armament:
8 x 105mm Bofors dual-purpose guns
4 x 40mm anti-aircraft guns
4 x 20mm anti-aircraft cannons
4 x 254mm Bofors guns capable of firing a 225kg shell a distance of 31km. (Authors' collection)

and progressed to the gates of Leningrad, the Kriegsmarine was able to start extending its influence further east.

Both of Finland's armoured coastal defence ships, *Väinämöinen* and *Ilmarinen*, became stranded on the west side of the blockade when the war started, while the navy's minelayers and most of the minesweepers remained on the opposite side of the minefields. The main goal of these sister ships was maintaining the blockade across the gulf. In addition they were tasked with laying smaller tactical minefields along the mouths of the southern harbours. There are no official records on how these affected the Soviet Navy, but at least during the evacuation of Tallinn – the 'Soviet Dunkirk' – the 190-ship Baltic Fleet suffered heavy losses exceeding tens of thousands of tons.

For the Finns their most devastating losses occurred during Operation *Nordwind* ('*North Wind*' – not to be confused with the January 1945 operation on the Western Front). This was a diversionary action that the German Navy requested the Finns take part in, once they themselves were ready to conquer the islands off the Estonian coast. The plan was for the Finns to organise a diversionary strike from the south side of Hanko towards these islands. *Ilmarinen* and *Väinämöinen* took part in the manoeuvre despite the fact that adequate minesweeping capability was not available to the convoy.

One of the last shots of the *Ilmarinen's* crew before the ship hit a mine on 13 September 1941, taking 271 sailors to the depths. (Authors' collection)

On 13 September 1941, the Finns sailed from Utö harbour. In addition to the two armoured ships the convoy comprised patrol boats, two armed icebreakers and a few German vessels. Their mission was to convince the Soviet observers that the Germans were preparing a landing on Hiidenmaa and Saarenmaa islands from the sea, rather than an invasion via the mainland as was actually the case. The operation experienced two major setbacks. First of all, the Soviets failed completely to detect the advancing Finnish vessels. Secondly, the Finnish flagship *Ilmarinen* struck a mine on its return trip. The vessel sank immediately, dragging 271 sailors with it into the depths.

Despite the loss of their flagship the navy had to intensify its operations.

The author Vesa Nenye's grandfather, Aarre Nenye, who was a senior chaplain for the crew of the *Ilmarinen*. A day before the vessel sailed for the final time, he fell seriously ill and was to remain on shore for the ship's fateful, final mission. After this, Chaplain Nenye continued to serve on other parts of the front. (Authors' collection)

INSET
During the Summer War, the Finns were content to disturb the supply of and contain the Soviet garrison at Hanko. Here, light mortars are shown firing from their protective trenches on the Hanko front. (Sa-Kuva)

MAIN PICTURE
Finnish soldiers advancing under barbed-wire obstacles on the Hanko front. Fearing an assault over the ice during the oncoming winter, the Soviet garrison fled during the night of 2 December. (Sa-Kuva)

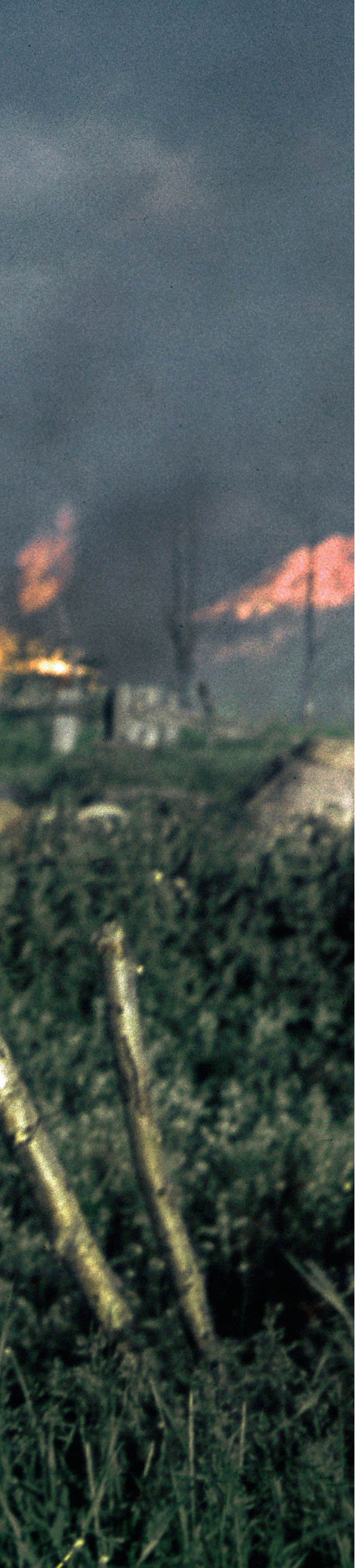
OPPOSITE
Initially the Finns greatly feared that the 35,000-strong forces at Hanko would serve as a bridgehead, opening a new front east of Helsinki. Here a patrol returns from a successful close-observation mission of the Hanko garrison. (Sa-Kuva)

During the autumn of 1941, supplies of coal used by Finnish industry had started to run low. The railway network from the harbours on the west coast was simply inadequate to deal with the imports and therefore the shipments had to be redirected to southern ports. This had to be accomplished despite the fact that Hanko still remained in Soviet hands and that the minefields were already in place. In the end, the Finnish minesweepers succeeded in keeping open a channel for these shipments. Their work would be made much easier if the Soviets could be evicted from Hanko.

At the start of the war, the Soviet naval base on the leased Hanko Peninsula had been surrounded by Group Hanko. This included the 17th Division and the 4th Coastal Brigade. The Finnish Navy tried to disrupt the Soviets from reinforcing their garrison and applied pressure from the cover of the nearby archipelago. At its height, the Soviet troops at Hanko numbered around 35,000 men, supported by heavy artillery and tanks. The main fear at the time was that this strong force would attack straight into western Finland. In general, the Finns were content to leave the Soviets alone and tried to soften the *motti* rather than risk losing men in capturing the base. With winter drawing near, the position of the Red Army and Navy at Hanko became more precarious. During the thaw and the season of open seas, the relatively weak Finnish Navy was unable to bring about a decisive victory. However, the ocean would soon freeze, allowing the army to bring in overwhelming numbers. Therefore, on 2 December, the Soviets abandoned the area under the cover of darkness.

Moving supplies across the Gulf of Finland now became much safer, and the Finns and their Axis allies could concentrate their focus on the remaining Soviet island strongholds in the gulf.

The heavily camouflaged *Väinämöinen* in the Finnish archipelago on 29 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)



CHAPTER 6

TRENCH WARFARE 1942–44

After the initial zeal of the attack phase, the Finns were content to guard their defensive positions and to bide their time until the end of the global conflict. On most fronts the war stagnated into a period of trench warfare, not to be broken before the Normandy landings and the concurrent major Soviet offensive. In the interim, both sides considerably downsized their forces on the front. The Soviets did carry out several small-scale attempts at breaching the lines, but these efforts lacked the focus of the whole army. During the winter of 1942, the Finns themselves executed an audacious plan to capture Suursaari Island. Other notable actions during this period were those made by the long-range reconnaissance patrols, which executed reconnaissance and sabotage missions deep inside the USSR. Mostly, the men just waited, and grew accustomed to the daily routines of the trenches.

Not having learned from the failed attacks during the winter, the Soviets again attempted to strike at the Finnish lines during the summer. This image shows the street-to-street fighting and burning of houses in Poventsa on 2 July 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

A propeller-driven snowmobile returning from a patrol near Haapasaari, Finland. (Sa-Kuva)

In the autumn of 1941, Mannerheim advised Erfurth, the German liaison officer: 'I do not want to attack any more, I have lost too many men already'. (Erfurth, n.d.) The Finnish Army had halted and dug in upon reaching favourable terrain. The hope was that this would support the political argument that theirs was a separate war, completely independent of that of Germany's aggressions. The Finns chose to wait, hoping that the major powers would resolve the conflict, allowing them to become neutral once again. 'Look out the war may soon be over!' was Göring's optimistic reassurance to Mannerheim. (Talvela, 1977)

The Soviet high command soon became aware of this Finnish policy, and left fewer forces to defend Leningrad and the rest of the front than they otherwise might have dared to. Every possible man that could be stripped from the Finnish front was now needed in the fight against the Germans further south.

Since the war with the Soviet Union had slowed, there no longer seemed to be military justification for keeping so many men under arms, nor was there any money left to continue to maintain the situation. By the end of 1941, maintaining such strong armed forces had simply become economically too draining for Finland. On other fronts, the German assaults in the direction of Murmansk were expected to continue, further distracting the Red Army.

As October turned, Minister of Trade Väinö Tanner had been visiting the Germans. The following exchange (almost certainly an embellished anecdote) between Göring and Tanner was later recorded in Talvela's diary:

Hitler being greeted by Mannerheim and President Risto Ryti in Finland on 4 June 1942. The Führer made this visit to celebrate Mannerheim's 75th birthday. It was already clear in the talks held at these meetings that the Finns were less than impressed with the German achievements so far; their own troops had reached practically all the agreed objectives, while the Wehrmacht's forces had lagged well behind their goals. (Sa-Kuva)

Göring: What would you [Finns] like us to do with Leningrad?
Tanner: We would like it to be destroyed.
Göring: Then it will be destroyed.
(Talvela, 1977)

The promised German conquest of Leningrad had not materialised so far, and even if they had wanted to, the Finns lacked the resources to destroy this metropolis alone. It is worth noting that the Finnish Artillery and Air Force never took part in the bombing of Leningrad. Equally, advancing any deeper into Soviet Russia was not an option. It would have been too hazardous due to the lack of resources and the exhausted state of the men. By now, more and more rank and file started to show signs of unhappiness about adopting the role of the aggressor. It seemed to them that the Soviets had already dealt with most of their Finnish kinsfolk in a very final way, and

In total, the Finns suffered losses of 12,628 men during the period of trench warfare. This was about half the number killed in the 105 days of Winter War, or during the assault phase of the Continuation War. Here, medical Lotta help an injured soldier. Nursing duties were amongst the first that the Lottas had adopted as their own. Soon these women auxiliaries would serve in almost all non-combat related roles in the army. (Naiskohtaloita Sotakuvien Takaa)

therefore there simply would be no need to take over more lands to the east. The current position could be well justified strategically, but not a step further.

By the end of 1941, the grim reaper had already collected a more bountiful harvest than during all of the Winter War, according to the headquarters' official tally from the time: 26,355 Finns had either been killed or were missing. (Raunio, 2013) Another *c*. 60,000 men were wounded and unfit for front-line duty.

The German attack across Eastern Europe, which had started so promisingly, had ground to a halt by the end of 1941. Operation *Platinfuchs* in the direction of Kantalahti and Murmansk had been poor from the outset, and in August the planned southern attack on Leningrad had to be put on hold. By the end of the year the Germans had made it to within 30km of Moscow, the closest they would ever get. At the opposite end of the front the Soviet counter-offensive halted the Germans in the town of Rostov. On the Leningrad Front, the planned encirclement of the city was almost but, critically, not fully achieved. A mere 120km of Lake Ladoga's southern shore still remained open. Therefore, the Soviets could still supply their encircled forces and the Finns were still forced to maintain a much wider frontal responsibility than planned.

When the attack halted across the front, German forces in Lapland had suffered nearly 21,000 casualties and were utterly spent. The shockingly cold winter haunted the ill-equipped troops while they waited for some

A typical example of the time-filling work that the men completed when the boredom of the front set in. Here the dugout has been decorated with elaborate woodwork. These efforts by communications pioneers from the 30th Infantry Regiment came second in the inter-company competition. (Sa-Kuva)

LOTTA SVÄRD

The women's Lotta Svärd organisation was officially founded in 1921. It was a response to the increasing number of women wanting to participate in the defence of the nation.

During the Winter War, its members worked in medical care, performed clerical duties, conducted air and sea surveillance and fulfilled other supply and logistics positions, freeing 12,000–24,000 men for active duty.

The majority of the 'Lottas' performed maintenance tasks on the home front. Others worked on the front line often as nurses, in clerical duties or in catering. As the Continuation War dragged on, the need for Lotta labour increased. The National Defence Force needed a better-trained workforce, especially for communication duties.

By 1944, Lotta Svärd included 242,000 women, making it the largest voluntary auxiliary organisation in the world.

Although a no-gun policy was one of the most important principles of Lotta Svärd, towards the end of the war the organisation had to allow the use of rifles by searchlight Lottas, who worked under constant threat of parachutists and invasion.

After the war, the Soviet Union demanded that all paramilitary organisations be banned. Lotta Svärd was officially disbanded on 23 November 1944.

The Finnish swastika. For thousands of years the swastika had been a symbol of good fortune. In Finland, the use of symbol can be dated back to the Iron Age and can be found in the decorations of many mediaeval churches. When the Swedish Count Erik von Rosen donated the first aircraft to the Finnish Army in 1918, it arrived emblazoned with his personal lucky charm, a blue swastika. During the same year, the newly formed Finnish Air Forces adopted it as their insignia. This same symbol, surrounded by four heraldic roses, was used by the Lotta Svärd women's organisation. The Finnish armoured forces opted to use the black and white version of the swastika on their tank turrets between 1941 and 1945. Today, a swastika can still be found in the Finnish presidential flag. (Lotta Svärd Museum)

Lottas sorting front-line mail at Viipuri on 20 February 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

Air-observation Lotta Eillen Kiuru at Lahdenpohja observation tower on 11 July 1942. The women of Finland fulfilled numerous important roles, even near the front line. (Sa-Kuva)

relief and warm clothing to arrive on the overly long supply roads. On 7 December, Japan woke a sleeping giant by attacking Pearl Harbor. Four days later Germany and Italy were also officially at war with the US.

By now it was slowly becoming apparent to the Finnish high command that the German war machine might not be able to carry out its mission. As was always the plan, the sooner Finland could exit the war the better. By now the economic burden was crippling the nation and soon the Finnish government was forced to consider decreasing the size of the army. Many rear-area duties, formerly completed by men, were carried out by the women's volunteer organisation Lotta Svärd.

This period of relatively quiet trench warfare still inflicted a cost. The Finnish high command tried to limit casualties in every possible way. For instance, Mannerheim gave orders that no reconnaissance missions should be carried out by a force stronger than a platoon, without his express permission.

Despite these good intentions, during 1942 a total 7,606 lives were lost. The following year, 4,267 died. Meanwhile, the number of sick and lightly injured remained high. Out of the 386,859 men serving on the front, 125,865 were in convalescence. Despite these losses, the general opinion was that even this grinding state of war was a much better option than a bad peace.

While many of the able-bodied men were required for farming or labour-intensive rebuilding, thousands of women were required for wartime industrial work. By the end of 1943, the manufacturing sector employed 141,593 people, of which more than half were women.

During the fiercest period of fighting in August 1941, an average of 547 Finns died each day. A small nation with fewer than four million people could not handle this kind of attrition for long. Furthermore, when this predominantly agricultural country had had its workforce stripped away, it led to a portion of the autumn crops left unharvested, rotting in the fields. This massive deficit of grain alone had to be acquired from abroad, lest the people starve. Going forward, it was seen as prudent to ensure that sufficient labour was available to maintain Finland's infrastructure and agriculture. Based on these considerations, on 5 November 1941, President Risto Ryti sent a letter to Mannerheim highlighting the importance of discharging a portion of the armed forces as soon as possible. He also wholly opposed the kinds of operations that III Army Corps had just commenced under German command (The intended final push for Murmansk Railway at Louhi).

Based on this reprimand, and considering that the original operational goals had more or less been reached, Mannerheim began to plan permanent

defences. On 28 November 1941, in a meeting between representatives of the armed forces and the government, he proposed that 9,000 men were to be discharged immediately, followed by another 110,000 in several stages. In the event that Leningrad fell, a further 250,000 men could be sent back home. The conquest of the city would have effectively meant the Germans taking control of most of the front, leaving the Finns guarding only a very narrow isthmus between the Wehrmacht's two directions of attack. This had been the goal all along, but already by now the Germans were behind schedule, and halving the Finnish Army in active service could not yet be sanctioned.

The original plan of discharge was to send home the oldest men first. Therefore the divisions soon started to reorganise their regiments based on soldiers' age. These discharges were to proceed depending on the relative safety and conditions of the front line. Most of the men sent home in the first wave were regular infantry, leaving the more specialised troops in place.

During the spring of 1942, 180,000 men were returned to their families while 450,000 still remained in service. Due to increased insecurity at the front, some of these soldiers were recalled in June 1942 and the plans for wider discharges were abandoned. Instead, front-line troops were to receive regular leave, farmers were able to return for seasonal work and those pursuing academic vocations might be granted study leave.

During this period a complete repopulation of the regained lands in Karelia was initiated. The refugees from the Winter War were desperate to return to their homelands and already by the end of 1941 almost 76,000 people had made the trek back. Upon their homecoming they found the country devastated. For instance, in Metsäpirtti village only one in a hundred dwellings was still standing. All the buildings that remained erect were immediately inhabited and the now empty plots rebuilt upon. Soon the towns and cities started to bustle again and wartime damage was repaired. By 15 May 1944, over 280,000 people had returned back home.

Since the Finns had also stretched their frontiers into Soviet Karelia, they now had to deal with the indigenous population. The Finns felt a shared kinship with 41,875 of those people, while 41,510 were of Slavic origin. During their retreat, the Soviets had taken with them all the able-bodied men and women. Initially the civilians in the conquered lands were given meagre emergency rations from the army's own supplies, but soon they received the same support as anyone else in Finland. Around 15,000 people whose homes were in ruins received help to relocate to large refugee camps. Special prison camps held 200 or so individuals caught taking part in sabotage missions. The occupying authorities even took care of the

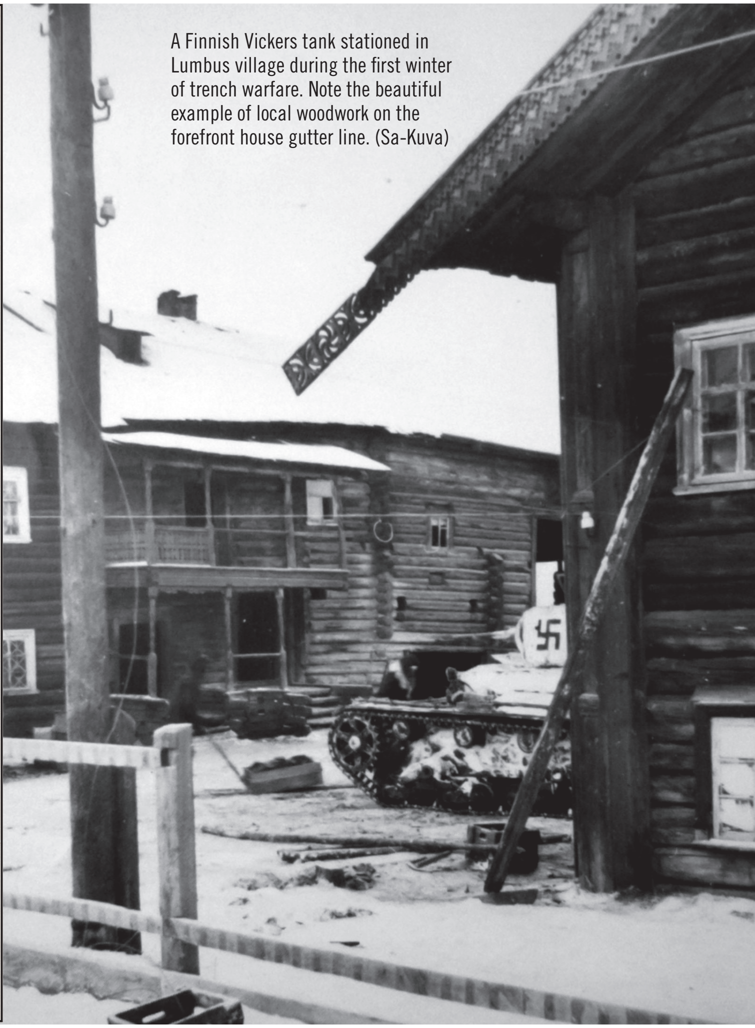
PUHDETYÖ HANDICRAFTS

During the two and a half years of trench warfare there was often little for the men to do. Occasionally the Soviets would perform feints or probing attacks, and in the interim, some would participate in long-range reconnaissance patrols or guard duty. Most of the time the soldiers waited idly in their dugouts. They combatted boredom with sports competitions, watching touring entertainers and by encouraging many to cultivate the land, hunt or fish in order to supplement their diet. However, many troops spent their free time doing the popular *Puhdetyö* handicrafts.

Puhdetyö comes from old Finnish words meaning 'after twilight' and 'work'. This term described the myriad of jobs which filled the hours of darkness, when there was not enough light left for those other necessary jobs of farm life. Each family had performed such tasks since time immemorial. In the dim light of the bunkers, amazing (certainly in terms of quantity) artefacts, pieces of art or everyday items were being created by nimble fingers using their *puukko* knives. Woodcarving was always popular, as were fashioning jewellery and keepsake boxes, ashtrays and rings.

The soldiers also took pride in competing to see which unit or squad dugout was the most ostentatious. The bunkers and trenches were often decorated in such flashy designs that the commanding officers had to order them to be torn down, lest the enemy observers spot them.

Many Finnish families still keep in high regard the *Puhdetyö* items their forefathers crafted during the war.



A Finnish Vickers tank stationed in Lumbus village during the first winter of trench warfare. Note the beautiful example of local woodwork on the forefront house gutter line. (Sa-Kuva)

A flamethrower team from the Jäger Pioneers on the Aunus Isthmus during the period of trench warfare. These weapons were only available to purchase in limited numbers from the Axis nations. (Sa-Kuva)

educational needs of the children by the creation of 112 Finnish and 44 Russian schools. At Äänislinna higher education was made available to all.

During the spring and summer of 1943, the Finns convinced the Germans to hand over more than 20,000 people from Ingria, saving them from the infamous camps. These kinsmen were given the same rights, and in general treated in the same way, as any other domestic refugee.

SIGNIFICANT BATTLES DURING THE TRENCH WARFARE PERIOD

Between 1942 and spring of 1944, the Soviets made several localised breakthrough attempts and feints. Numerous probing attacks occurred on the Syväri front, under Gorelenko's command, which was placed directly under Stavka's control and renamed Seventh Separate Army. Gorelenko's forces consisted of six Rifle divisions and four Naval Rifle brigades. Against him stood a total of four Finnish and one German infantry divisions. The overall command of the area for the Finnish side had been transferred to Lieutenant-General Karl Oesch's Aunus Group.

The first major Soviet attack took place on the Maaselkä Isthmus at the beginning of January 1942. It seems that the Soviet plan was to pre-empt an anticipated Finnish attack towards Sorokka. At this time, the Soviets were not yet ready to believe that their enemy had stopped the advance. Sorokka would have indeed been a very valuable target as the railway junction there was pivotal to Allied plans.

In December, two fresh divisions transferred to the area in preparation for the attack. Their objective was to hit Krivi station at the centre of the defensive lines. With these new reinforcements, the Red Army could now pit a total of seven divisions and two brigades against the Finns' meagre two divisions and one brigade.

On 1 January, the Soviets started their offensive. It took their soldiers three weeks of constant attacking, with vastly superior numbers, to capture the station at Krivi in the centre of the isthmus. Laatikainen's II Army Corps soon contained the breach. Once the situation was under control, Laatikainen ordered his troops to counter-attack. By 7 February, after two days of fierce fighting, the Finns managed to recapture the station. Meanwhile, a wide flanking move by Soviet ski battalions to the peninsula south-west of Poventsa surprised the Finns. These men had used the Finns' own tactics against them and skied across the frozen northern end of Lake Ääninen. Despite the initial shock, the Soviet attackers were repelled in the ensuing week-long battles. A similar fate also awaited the ski-troops attempting the capture of Klimetski Island north-west of Äänislinna. During

A Finnish T-26 tank in winter camouflage carrying infantry into combat on the Maaselkä front during the period of trench warfare. (Sa-Kuva)

January and February of 1942, the Finnish troops on the Maaselkä Isthmus suffered around 3,000 casualties. There are no exact numbers available for the Soviets, but according to the Karelian Front headquarters, the first eight days alone had cost them over 10,300 men.

While the Soviet attacks were taking place around Syväri and the Maaselkä Isthmus, Finnish headquarters ordered Major Arnold Majewski's two-battalion-strong Task Force M to perform a long-range patrol-strike deep into the enemy's rear. Majewski's mission was to proceed cross-country on the northern side of Lake Seesjärvi and sabotage a section of the Murmansk railway near Maiguba, just north of Sekee town, on the shores of Lake Uikujärvi. On 14 January, Majewski's troops started on a ski trek of more than 100km to their target. After setting up temporary base camp at Lake Voldajärvi, they proceeded towards the railway. On 19 January, the task force attacked the station area at Maiguba and the tracks further north from there. The following morning, the Finns disengaged and started their return trip. The journey back was completed within two days and with a total of only four hours' rest. The attack was a success, destroying a solid section of the railway.

A flanking attack by the Soviet 1st Ski Brigade over the frozen north end of Lake Ääninen took the Finnish troops at Poventsa by surprise. This led to heavy fighting in the area between 8 and 11 January 1942, during which the 1st Ski Brigade was defeated and suffered 1,284 casualties. (Sa-Kuva)

Major offensives during spring 1942

Soviet ski-troops and regular infantry tried in vain to break the Finnish defences at the Maaselkä Isthmus. According to the Karelian Front command, the Soviet Maaselkä command lost 5,242 men during early January, and the 367th Infantry Division alone suffered 2,413 casualties at the battles in the Krivi area between 5 and 14 February 1942. Here some Soviet infantry can be seen practicing marksmanship in cold conditions. (Sa-Kuva)

The next serious Soviet attempt was planned to occur during the worst spring thaws, or *rasputitsa* season, of 1942. Stavka hoped that by attacking simultaneously from two separate directions they would cause the Finnish countermeasures to be split and sufficiently delayed on the sea of mud that the roads would become. The Finnish word *rospuutto* means 'roadlessness' and well describes what the melting snow did to the already poor dirt tracks across the frontier.

South of the Syväri front, newly concentrated formations started their attack on 11 April. For this breakthrough, the Soviet commanders had gathered six divisions and four brigades against the Finns' four divisions. The attack proceeded on a wide front. The Finns managed to hold off the assault everywhere except on their left flank. There the Red Army penetrated all the way to the Podporoze–Oshta road where the Soviet forces managed to keep hold of the ground. By 19 April, the Finns had finally gathered sufficient reinforcements against the breach so that they could launch their own counter-manoeuvre from the west. They soon succeeded in surrounding the

Soviet spearhead, and recaptured the front line on 21 April. Finnish Army reports state that they suffered some 2,165 casualties, of whom 440 were killed during the *rasputitsa* battles at Syväri. According to Seventh Separate Army's statistics, the Soviets suffered 12,800 casualties out of which 3,439 were dead and 847 missing in action.

This failure by their comrades prompted the Karelian Front's Twenty-Sixth Army stationed in the Kiestinki area to start its own attacks on 24 April. There the Soviets outnumbered the Finnish Division J and forces of the German 6th SS-Mountain Division 'North' ('6th' was added to this unit's name in January 1942) by more than two to one. The main body was to attempt an unusual manoeuvre by Red Army standards. The assaulting troops braved the wilderness, sweeping around the Finnish flank from the north. Close to the Kiestinki road, the Soviets managed to get behind the lines and attack the rear of the Finnish defences. Their encirclement was finally brought to a stop on 7 May. Once the German reinforcements arrived (some of which had been delayed by a smaller diversionary attack around Petsamo), the determined attack led by Division J resulted in the original line of defence being re-established by 24 May.[4] The head of Army Command Lapland,[5] Dietl, criticised Siilasvuo for stopping his counter-attack at the old positions, rather than pushing his advantage further. A total of 248 Germans and 170 Finns died defending the Kiestinki area. The attempt cost the Soviet Twenty-Sixth Army over 22,300 casualties, with more than 4,466 either dead or missing.

Soon after the Kiestinki battles, preparations began for Siilasvuo's III Army Corps' area of responsibility to be moved further south. From 1 July 1942 onwards, the newly arrived German XVIII Mountain Corps was to take over in the area north of Uhtua. By then III Army Corps comprised only the 3rd Division, which was to remain in the area until it was needed on the Karelian Isthmus for the Soviet summer offensive of 1944. Siilasvuo himself had been transferred to become the Chief Inspector of Military Training. He was to be recalled to take charge once again of the reformed III Army Corps in the defensive battles of 1944.

4 The Finnish high command also used this situation as a reason to begin the transfer of the 163rd Infantry Division from the Syväri front back to the direct command of the German Army. It had now become politically urgent to cease the co-belligerent status and to distance the Finnish nation from the Germans.

5 In November 1941, a consensus was reached to relieve the Finnish troops under Army Command Norway. This had led to the formation of the new, mostly German, Army Command Lapland on 14 January 1942 under Dietl. Later the same year his forces were renamed Twentieth Mountain Army. By the end of 1942, only four separate Finnish battalions and Task Force S remained under Dietl's command.

CHAPTER 7

CAPTURING SUURSAARI ISLAND

One of the most daring and unique Finnish operations during the period of trench warfare was the capture of Suursaari Island in the Gulf of Finland, 43km south of Kotka and 56km north of the Estonian coast. Due to its location, this 11km-long island had great strategic significance. Artillery stationed there could control most of the sea lanes to Leningrad. In 1939, the Soviet Union repeatedly approached Finland to see if it could annex Suursaari and the other outlying islands. When these requests were refused, the Red Army took the islands by force during the Winter War.

During the Summer War, the Finnish and German high commands agreed that Suursaari and other outlying islands had to be wrested back from Soviet hands. When supported from these islands, the Soviet Navy was able to disrupt all naval traffic to Kotka harbour, and extend their

Perhaps the most audacious of the Finnish operations carried out during the war was the commando-style attack to seize Suursaari Island. Here the men of the task force can be seen on their way to the staging areas. In order to avoid early detection on the ice plateau, even the horses wore white sheets as camouflage. (Sa-Kuva)

When even the snowploughs got stuck, the men would jump in to help. Finnish soldiers are shown digging the road open at 05:00 during the morning of the attack, 27 March 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

range of operations deeper into the Baltic Sea. Conversely, if Finland were to hold the islands, it would enable the Germans to bottle up the Soviet Navy into a small corner of the Gulf of Finland. In addition, the establishment of air observation bases on the archipelago could provide early warnings that would considerably increase tactical timeframes for all aerial operations.

Finnish headquarters agreed on a joint operation with the Wehrmacht high command to capture Suursaari and the neighbouring islands. They decided that the best time for the attack would be during midwinter across the frozen Gulf of Finland. Attacking while the sea lanes were still open was considered too risky, as the enemy would be able to ship reinforcements and heavy equipment rapidly to the islands. Once it became apparent that the Germans could not spare the troops needed for the operation, Mannerheim decided that the Finns would carry out the audacious plan themselves. Nevertheless, Luftwaffe support was still expected and officially requested (though it would never appear).

Mannerheim handpicked Major-General Aaro Pajari to lead the attack. He had already proven his worth as an able field commander; first during the Winter War at the battle of Tolvajärvi and again as the commander of the 18th Division during the attack phase of 1941. Despite the involvement of some 3,500 men and 67 planes, Pajari gave orders for the landing plans to be kept top secret.

The Finns had managed to gather relatively accurate intelligence on the strength of the enemy defences. Suursaari belonged to the Leningrad Naval District and was under the jurisdiction of one of their oldest navy formations, the Baltic Fleet, commanded by Vice-Admiral Vladimir Tributs. The Suursaari garrison was commanded by Colonel Barinov, who in turn

reported to the fortress commander at the nearby Lavansaari Island. Despite the island's significance, the vital bases at Suursaari were manned by only 496 soldiers, 12 officers and the compulsory eight political commissars.

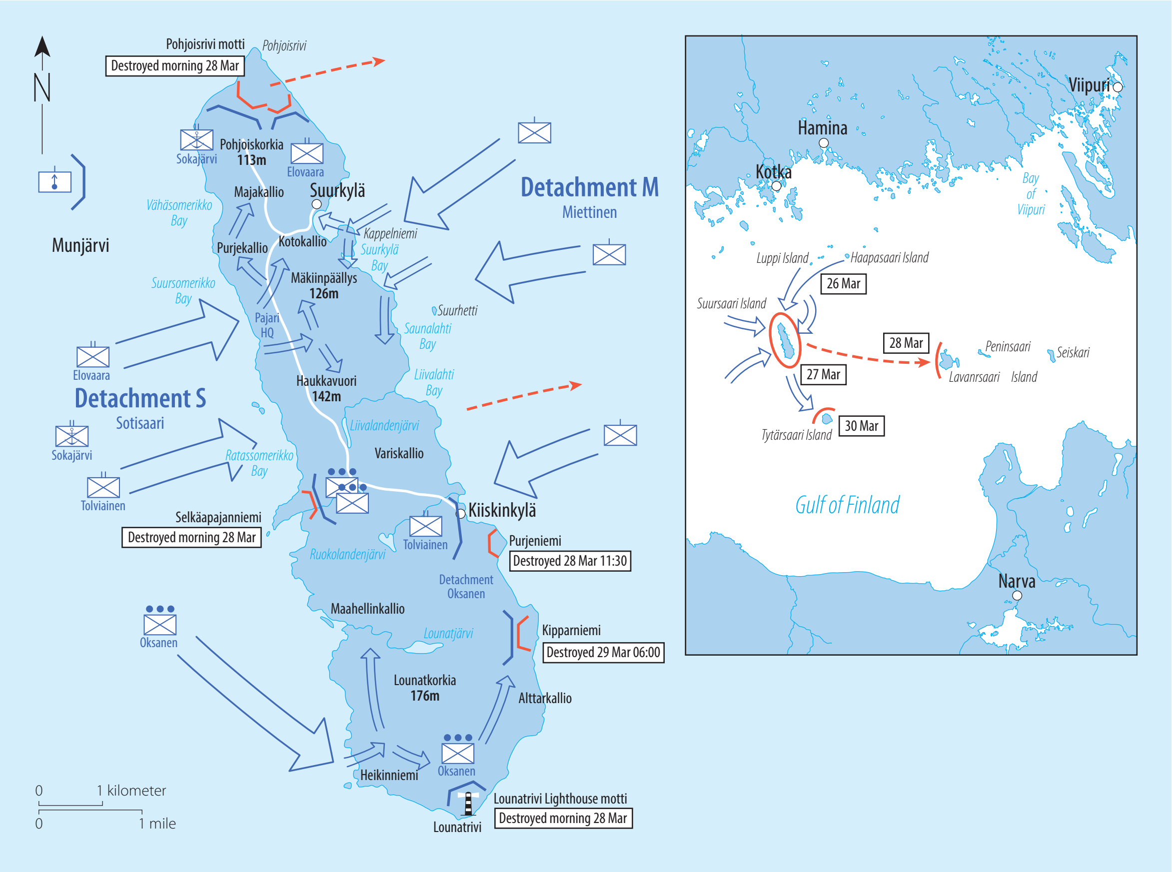
The Finns also understood the strength of the fortifications on the rocky island. The problem was how to transport the chosen few thousand men to the vicinity of the island quietly and unseen, quickly enough and with still enough energy left for the fight. The Arctic landscape provided another challenge: the transports had to somehow traverse undetected across a completely horizontal ice plateau (which was entirely devoid of cover) for dozens of kilometres.

Pajari's plan was to first move the designated troops into staging areas, near Haapasaari and Luppi islands, about 10–15km away from their targets. He hoped to schedule his attack so that heavy snowfall would help conceal the approaching troops. However, this also meant that the necessary roads across the ice would have to be continuously ploughed to keep them open. Strong winds blowing from the open sea could pile up the snowdrifts so fast that whole roads could vanish within 20 minutes. In order to keep routes and assembly areas clear, five cars and one tractor, all fitted with snowploughs, worked continuously for a total of 408 hours.

All of the men were issued with brand new snowsuits. All their equipment was to be painted white. Furthermore, the 738 horses had to be camouflaged with white sheets and the trucks, sleighs and heavy weapons similarly painted. The troops moved into the area mainly on horse-drawn sleighs or in trucks. As time was of the essence, some men on skis were to be drawn along, holding onto ropes trailing from the crammed trucks. In addition to all the soldiers and their weapons, several bridge sections were taken along, in case the ice

A horse-drawn anti-tank gun being dragged and manhandled into position near the Soviet fortifications at Lounatrivi lighthouse on 27 March 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

Battle for Suursaari, 1942



cracked and caused a chasm to open across the ice road. White tents were to be set up at 10km intervals along the track. These were to serve as supply points and field hospitals. In the end the total traffic on the ice was so extensive that it was a miracle the Soviets did not notice the preparations for the attack. For the time being, aircraft were only stationed on the mainland. When the time came, they were to be charged with reconnaissance duty and then the support and protection of the infantry during the attack. Additionally, they were tasked with evacuating the wounded and preventing the enemy from withdrawing from Suursaari Island.

The main Finnish attack force was split into two battalions: the 1st Battalion of the 27th Infantry Regiment under Major Lauri Toiviainen, and the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Infantry Regiment under Captain Veikko Elovaara. There was also a reserve coastal guard battalion commanded by Major Åke Sokajärvi in the vicinity of the main attack. Lieutenant-Colonel

OPPOSITE
Soviet soldiers on skis hit the ground to return fire. This image is from the archives the Finns captured earlier in the war. (Sa-Kuva)

Lauri Sotisaari led the spearhead with his Detachment S, which was to assault the western shore under cover of darkness. From there his men would then move both north and south along the frozen shoreline while the body of his command took control of the road connecting the two small settlements on the island. Several heavy mortars assigned to the detachment would provide tactical support. A simultaneous attack was also scheduled to start from the opposite, eastern side of the island by Detachment M under Major Martti Miettinen; its role was to prevent the enemy from escaping over the ice, and to act as a distraction from the main assault. Once the enemy dug in to defend, he was to continue his attack towards the two settlements of Suurkylä and Kiiskinkylä. Two light artillery batteries and several anti-tank guns were to provide support for the detachment.

(1897–1949)

AARO PAJARI

MAJOR-GENERAL
TASK FORCE AT SUURSAARI

After graduation, Aaro Olavi Pajari joined the Civil Guards in 1917. He was wounded twice during the Finnish Civil War, and participated in the Aunus Expedition as Talvela's second-in-command. Despite having a heart condition, Lieutenant-Colonel Pajari led the 16th Regiment (Group Talvela) to the first major Finnish victory in the Winter War. He was promoted colonel on 18 December 1939, and took command of the corps-sized Group Talvela upon Talvela's transfer to the Karelian Isthmus.

At the onset of the Continuation War, Pajari's 18th Division achieved a breakthrough by crossing the Vuoksi River on the Karelian Isthmus, winning Pajari his first Mannerheim Cross on 3 October 1941.

During the first winter of the war, Major-General Pajari commanded the audacious operation to capture Suursaari Island. In October 1943, Pajari took command of the 3rd Division at Uhtua. His unit was then transferred to the Karelian Isthmus during the spring of 1944, in time for the defensive battles that summer. Although the enemy managed to breach the division's defence of the VT Line at Kuuterselkä, Pajari's men stood firm at the battle of Noskua in defence of the VKT Line.

Pajari's daring landing in Tornio was the first Finnish engagement in the Lapland War, and he received the Mannerheim Cross for a second time on 16 October 1944. This excellent offensive tactician finally died of cardiac arrest on his way to work in 1949.

The troops moved into their staging areas and settled into camouflaged tents near the Luppi and Haapasaari Islands. All that was needed was propitious weather. During this crucial time, the Finnish Air Force prevented Soviet planes from approaching close enough to get an idea of the scale of the preparations. On 27 March, once the temperature had dropped to -6°C, Pajari judged that the snow conditions were ideal to launch the attack on skis. Before the assault commenced, each man received a warm meal and 100ml of cognac blended with vodka, in order to give them the boost needed for rapid approach and attack.

The men moved to their jumping-off points. In order to ensure total darkness no fires were permitted and light bulbs were removed from the truck headlights, just in case somebody switched them on accidentally. Unfortunately, the first time the column of vehicles stopped, a long trail of red lights lit up; no one had remembered to remove the bulbs from the brake lights. Luckily for the Finns, this happened far enough away from the Soviet lines that the attackers could continue undetected.

Major-General Pajari, unaware that he is standing in a minefield on a makeshift speaker's podium, giving his speech at the Suursaari victory parade on 28 March 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

Nevertheless, observers at Suursaari finally realised that something was afoot. On the evening of 26 March at 21:30 the following message was sent to headquarters at nearby Lavansaari Island: 'About a battalion-strength enemy force seen staging around Haapasaari Island before darkness fell. Special patrols have been sent to observe.' Lavansaari was at the time snowed in and 40km distant; sending any support there would be slow. However, the island did have an airfield, so in theory at least, air support could be rapidly scrambled.

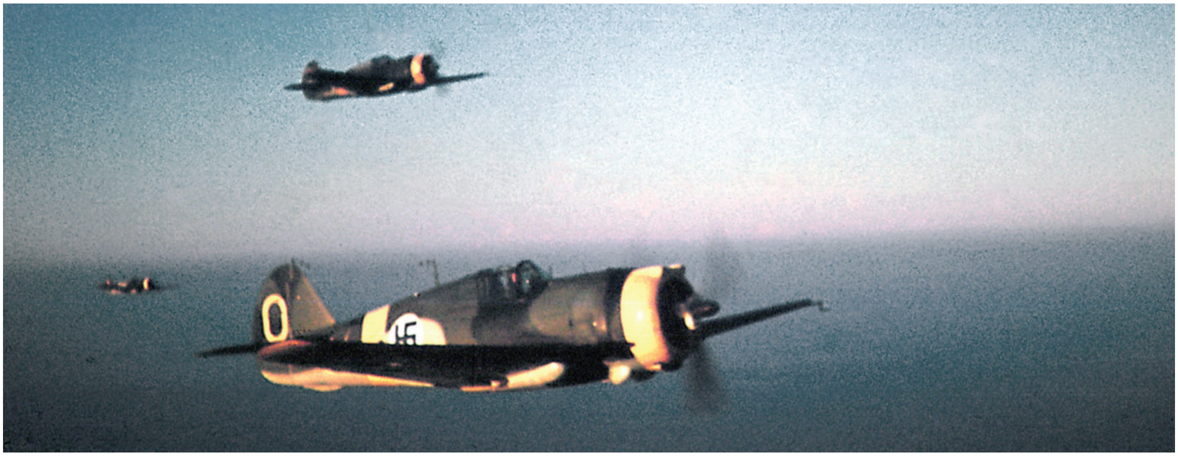
However, the sighting had come too late. The significance and strength of the Finnish forces was greatly underestimated. After sending the message, Colonel Barinov raised the alarm at Suursaari Island standing his men to. For some reason, instead of sending out patrols to gauge the enemy's intentions, he was content with letting the troops fight the cold in their foxholes. Although the temperature was only -6°C, the Arctic wind blowing across the ice made matters much worse. At the same time, the increasing snowfall continued to hinder visibility. While the Soviet troops seemed

to be hibernating, the Finns approached the island from two directions. Everything was going to plan. Suursaari lay ahead, silhouetted dimly through the billowing snow.

The heavy mortars reached their positions 1.5km from the island, with the light mortars pulled to a mere 500m from the shore. The attack commenced at 04:00 with the troops starting to ski towards the island. When the vanguard of Detachment S was near the western shoreline, the Soviets opened fire. At the same time, the smaller Detachment M had spread out on a wide front on the ice and now engaged the enemy positions from the east. Soon a fierce firefight had developed on both sides of the island. Once the main Finnish forces secured a bridgehead, they started to force their way north and south along the rocky island. Progress was slowed by having to climb steep, rocky cliffs and to wade through ravines filled with deep snow. However, despite the determination of the Soviet defenders, the southerly force soon captured the middle of the island and Kiiskinkylä. At the same time, the majority of Detachment S targeted the rear of Suurkylä and the heavily fortified northern peninsula. A small number of men under Detachment Oksanen were sent to simultaneously secure the southernmost tip of the island from the west.

The Finnish numbers came to bear during the night and through the following morning, when the northern part of Detachment S was able to assault the positions in Suurkylä. Here the Soviets managed to hold out until 15:00. By this time, most of the other important strategic objectives around the island had been captured. Nevertheless, the Soviets continued to resist in several fortified positions across the island and by nightfall, six Soviet fighter planes flew over in support. Twelve Finnish fighters met the enemy planes and proceeded to shoot down four of them. A fifth Soviet

A Curtiss squad from the 1st Flight Regiment, over the Aunus Isthmus in an image taken on 18 October 1943. A total of 29 Curtiss Hawk 75 or P-36 fighter planes had been bought from Germany in 1940. A further 15 were acquired in 1943. During the war the Curtiss fighters achieved a total of 190 aerial victories; the Finns lost only 14 of these planes as well as nine pilots. (Sa-Kuva)



Finnish anti-aircraft guns placed on the ice had no shortage of targets after the victory parade at Suursaari on 28 March 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

aircraft was hit by flak, and only one plane was able to return back to its base at Lavansaari Island.

At this stage, the fiercest opposition came from the Soviets on Selkäapajanniemi Peninsula. There the defenders had used thick timber logs to build extremely strong fortifications in the natural openings in the bedrock. The Finnish Air Force was called upon to soften up these positions. At 17:30, four bombers arrived, strafing the strongholds with machine guns and delivering a total payload of 2,000kg of bombs. By the evening, the Soviet defenders had had enough, and decided to escape over the ice. The Finns pursued them relentlessly across the vastness.

By the bright light of dawn the following morning, the Finns had cleared out the last three fortifications offering resistance at Selkäapajanniemi. This left only one determined enemy stronghold at Lounatrivi lighthouse. So far, the defenders there had resisted all attacks by the Finns. Two pioneer detachments and an artillery squad were sent to resolve the matter. The crew manhandled their gun on top of the piled ice. After setting their sights, they opened fire systematically against the lighthouse, shelling it from the top down a floor at a time. This forced the defenders to flee downwards and eventually out of the front door. Even now, these brave men refused to surrender. They were all killed in the fight that ensued. Kipparniemi Peninsula also held a small Soviet detachment. After completely surrounding the enemy, the Finns concluded that their positions were not strongly fortified. Therefore it was decided to let them stew until the following morning.

The whole of Suursaari finally came under Finnish control on 28 March. That day, Pajari decided to organise a victory parade on the ice in front of the island. Two flights of six Curtis fighter planes each were to fly sentry over the formations. After giving the orders for the procession, Pajari telephoned Mannerheim at his headquarters in Mikkeli: ‘I hereby notify you that I have more or less captured Suursaari Island. Only some minor pockets of resistance remain.’ After the phone call, Pajari found time for a quick nap in his tent. Meanwhile, his men hastened into the parade formations and readied themselves for inspection. The men also had time to assemble a makeshift speaker’s podium on top of a horse-drawn sleigh and a military marching band was even rushed all the way from Helsinki for the occasion. It was extremely risky to organise the parade so soon. Had Soviet planes happened on the scene, the men would have made easy targets on the flat, cover-free ice. Nonetheless, Pajari seemed to have had great faith in the aircraft flying over his men.

The first incident happened after all the men had been inspected, the chaplain had given his sermon and the last of the speeches delivered. At this

stage, a lone Soviet machine-gun squad chose to reveal itself and surrender. They had been hiding a mere 100m away from the place where Pajari had been speaking. Had the sergeant in charge of the heavy weapon fancied some posthumous Soviet fame for himself, at least a dozen Finnish soldiers could have been killed. Afterwards, it also came to light that the general and his chief of staff had been positioned directly on top of a minefield. It was sheer good fortune that it had snowed so much, as this prevented the pressure-mines from detonating.

When the excitement of taking care of the surrendering Soviets had died down, a radio message reached Pajari. Twenty-nine enemy planes were approaching the island in three formations of eight, eleven and ten planes. Only one Finnish flight of six Curtiss fighter planes was still in the area while the second flight had already moved nearer to Lavansaari Island. It transpired that the parade had an air show-style finale. The aerial battle quickly developed into a spinning carousel with planes flying in every direction. The six Finnish planes on site engaged immediately with no shortage of targets. The second flight returned quickly from the direction of Lavansaari, attacking the rearmost of the Soviet formations. In the end, the Finns destroyed 18 of the 29 enemy planes without suffering any losses of their own. Earlier the same day, another flight of Brewsters had bagged itself five confirmed kills and a Fokker unit four more. This score of 27 confirmed enemy kills was (to date) the highest one-day tally achieved by the Finnish Air Force. Such triumphs did come with a hefty price: each pilot was forced to fly or be on high alert throughout the day and night. During the last days of the operation, the only way the men kept themselves fit to fly was through heavy use of the German-made combat stimulant Pervitin (methamphetamine). In total, they flew 643 combat missions and delivered over 5,000kg of bombs during the operation.

With Suursaari now secured, the Finns and Germans proceeded to lay down an extensive mine blockade. The minelayer *Ruotsinsalmi* is shown here operating in the Gulf of Finland on 18 May 1942. These sea-mines would bob to the surface a few seconds after deployment. (Sa-Kuva)

WAR IN THE GULF OF FINLAND

On the day of the triumph at Suursaari Island, the Finnish headquarters received dismal news from their German counterparts. Their co-belligerent's forces would not be able to carry out the agreed missions for the occupation of the islands of Seiskari, Lavansaari and Tytärsaari. This was an unfortunate strategic setback for the Finns, as again the Germans were leaving them to face a much larger front and greater risks than originally planned. As the

(1919–1965)

LAURI TÖRNI
SISSI COMMANDER

Lauri Allan Törni, also known as Larry Thorne, is one of the most famous soldiers of the 20th century, who was a recipient of high military awards in the Finnish, German and US armies before he perished leading a secret commando mission in Vietnam in 1965.

Lauri volunteered for service in 1938, and during the Winter War he was soon earmarked for officer training. Before Törni could start any such schooling, due to the unit's officers all becoming wounded, he received command of a whole company. With his men he was to take part in the destruction of the Western Lemetti *motti*.

During the spring of 1941, Törni volunteered for the SS, but due to a lack of permanent officer posts, he chose to return to his homeland at the end of July. When back in Finland, he requested to join the 8th Light Detachment, which had a reputation for being a tough fighting unit. At first, Törni was given command of a machine-gun squadron and soon afterwards a tank squad.

On 23 March 1942, whilst skiing behind the enemy lines, Törni was badly wounded by a shrapnel mine. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant while still recovering in a military hospital, from which he escaped to make his way back to the front.

In January 1943, Törni was made the commander of one of the two newly formed *Sissi* companies. Soon, his unit was so feared across the Soviet front's hinterlands that Moscow Tiltu's propaganda speech offered 3,000,000 Finnish marks for the capture of Törni, dead or alive. Many athletic and keen soldiers, who were seeking active commands during the period of trench warfare, applied for transfer to Törni's company. One such young man was the future president of Finland (1982–94), Mauno Koivisto.

On 9 July 1944, Törni was made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross. The commendation was based on the repeated successful long-range reconnaissance patrol missions he had led, and especially on the action his company had taken in halting enemy regiments advancing towards the Tsalkki crossing.

Törni was made a captain in August 1944, and was discharged in the November of the same year. When Finland committed to the Lapland War, Törni escaped on a submarine to Germany. The reason for this seemingly treacherous act was to prepare and return to train Finnish resistance soldiers in the event that the Soviets managed to completely occupy the country.

Törni's movements during the last days of the Reich are unclear, but he returned to Finland in 1945 where he was soon captured by the Red Valpo and convicted as a traitor. He received a presidential pardon in 1948.

In the 1950s Törni jumped from a ship passing Alabama, and swam to shore. He found his way to New York, and in January 1954, he adopted the name Larry Thorne and enrolled in the US Army as a private. From 1957, Lieutenant Thorne was stationed in Germany in the 10th Special Forces Group. In 1962 Thorne's eight-man squad succeeded in a daring commando operation high in the Iranian mountains.

Thorne made two tours of duty in Vietnam as a Green Beret. He was killed when his helicopter was shot down near the Laos border in October 1965. In addition to his Mannerheim Cross, Thorne was awarded the Iron Cross, the Legion of Merit and (twice) the Purple Heart.

situation could not be helped, the nearby Tytärsaari Island at least would have to be captured by the Finns alone.

The Finns managed to occupy Tytärsaari on 30 March. They were met with only light opposition, as the enemy quickly withdrew. This time the Germans had agreed to take over garrisoning the island and the first unit arrived the following day. The main body, consisted of two infantry companies and two anti-aircraft batteries, chiefly comprised troops from Estonia and Ingria. As the Soviet forces on the ice halted their retreat within striking distance of the island, one Finnish detachment was left to reinforce the defences under the command of the German Oberstleutnant Behle. There the mingling Finnish and German forces started some immediate black-market bartering, trading Finnish fur hats for German cognac. Soon the officers had to enforce a total embargo.

It became clear to the Soviets that the rapid recapture of Suursaari and its fortifications would be impossible as a far larger force would have to be assembled. Instead, they tried to recapture Tytärsaari Island on 8 April. At 06:50, around 1,000 infantry assaulted the island from three directions. Together the Finns and the Germans repelled all the attacks. In the attempt, the Soviets lost 270 men including the regiment and battalion commanders. These were even heavier losses than those inflicted during the battle for Suursaari. The Finnish casualties included three killed and two wounded. By 10 April, as the Soviets had not attacked again, the last of the Finnish soldiers departed the island, leaving it to the German garrison. Finnish forces never attempted to regain Lavansaari, Peninsaari and Seiskari islands.

Upon the recapture of Suursaari, the Finns started a rapid programme

(1914–1999)

ILMARI 'ILLU' JUUTILAINEN

WARRANT OFFICER 24TH AND 34TH FIGHTER SQUADRONS

Eino Ilmari Juutilainen became interested in flying as a boy in Karelia. In 1935 his childhood passion turned into a career, when he enrolled in the Air Force as an NCO pilot.

Throughout the Winter War, Juutilainen flew a Fokker D.XXI for the 24th Flight Squadron. During this bitter conflict he opened his account with two confirmed kills.

During the Continuation War, Juutilainen flew a Brewster fighter plane. By April 1943 he had already destroyed a further 35 Soviet aircraft. Following this feat, Juutilainen transferred to the newly created 34th Fighter Squadron equipped with the modern Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2.

With his Me-109, Juutilainen achieved a further 56 confirmed kills. His officially tally of 93 aerial victories makes him the highest scoring non-German ace. Juutilainen himself claims to have downed a total of 128 enemy craft, but due to the lack of official confirmation these are not generally acknowledged. He was one of six people to receive the Mannerheim Cross twice.

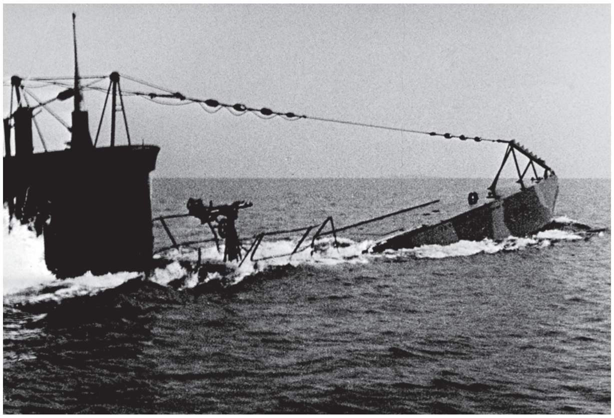
Enduring proof of Juutilainen's skill in the air is that his planes were never hit by a single enemy bullet. Conversely, he did lose several aircraft to enemy anti-aircraft flak. Juutilainen developed his own unique flying style which was the main contributing factor towards the Soviet pilots' inability to put him in their sights. Paraphrasing his own words: 'When you know how to fly, and are a master at it, it does not matter if there is one or two enemies. The worst situation arises when there are five or six foes, as it will be difficult to observe them all. On the other hand, if there is, let's say, a hundred enemy craft in the air, one can just dive in the middle and wreak havoc to your heart's content.'

The submarine net running across the Gulf of Finland. The image was taken looking towards Porkkala harbour on 26 July 1944 and shows the narrow navigable gap near Rännskäri–Porkkala. Despite these counter-measures, some Soviet submarines still managed to slip through. (Sa-Kuva)

of improvements to its fortifications and defences. The 12th Coastal Artillery Regiment took responsibility for overall defence of the sea around the island. As soon as the ice cover broke, Finnish and German ships together started to lay down a mine blockade in the narrows between Haapasaari, Suursaari and Tytärsaari islands. In May alone, the Finnish Navy deployed over 3,000 sea mines between Haapasaari and Suursaari islands. From positions within the archipelago, both light and heavy artillery guarded these minefields.

The Finns did not believe that anyone would attempt a landing on the islands during the summer months. However, should the front move closer to home, a winter assault was likely to become a genuine threat. If the ice was thick enough, and heavy tanks were used for the assault, the troops on the island would probably become isolated, and would have to hold their positions without any help from the mainland. Therefore, three strongpoints, at Pohjoiskorkia, Mäkipäällys and Lounatkorkia, were constructed. Should a landing be successful, the Finns would retreat into these positions, and then plan to hold out for up to six months.

Fortification work continued at Suursaari Island throughout the whole Continuation War. In April 1943, the Finns added a further 12,268 sea mines and obstacles to the defences. During 1944, a further 9,792 sea mines were deployed. The Germans even deployed an anti-submarine net that stretched from the Porkkala Peninsula across the whole Gulf of Finland to Naissaari Island and from there to the Estonian coast.



In general, the Gulf of Finland was ill-suited to submarine warfare, due to the narrow sea lanes and prolific use of sea-mines. During the war, Finland had five submarines: the *Vetehinen*, *Vesisihiisi* and *Iku-Turso* were medium class and the *Vesikko* and *Saukko* were light submarines. The medium-class vessels managed to sink one enemy submersible each, after which the Soviets gradually sent fewer submarines to the area. The victory achieved by the *Vetehinen* was somewhat unusual. To begin with, the torpedoes launched at the target at short range ran under the target. The Finns then switched to using the deck gun. With this they scored several direct hits on the enemy vessel. The Soviet submarine tried to escape by diving, and the Finnish captain reacted fast by having his vessel ram the enemy. The *Vetehinen* hit the Soviet vessel across the bridge deck. After the Finns freed themselves by reversing carefully, the Soviet submarine tilted on its side. Water poured in through the gap the collision had caused, and the enemy vessel soon sank. (Sa-Kuva)

SISSI AND *KAUKOPARTIO*

During the prolonged period of trench warfare, special guerrilla units were formed. Colloquially, the terms *kaukopartio* (long-range reconnaissance patrol) and *sissi* (guerrilla unit) were often used synonymously, although their tasks and roles were separate. The role of the *kaukopartio* units was similar to those of the contemporary British SAS and the Long-Range Desert Group. Its units were assigned directly under headquarters' command, whereas the *sissi* guerrilla units were assigned to local army corps commands and specialised in short-range reconnaissance and attack missions. Perhaps the most fundamental difference was the drafting and training of up to battalion-strength *sissi* units from the ranks of the corps itself, while the *kaukopartio* troops were always gathered from volunteers who were already experienced veterans. In general, the larger *sissi* units were more active in combat and sabotage operations, whereas *kaukopartio* forces were mostly tasked with reconnaissance and intelligence gathering. Some long-distance operations behind enemy lines did, however, turn into combat and sabotage missions as opportunities presented themselves.

Kaukopartio operatives functioned in their own unit, independently from the rest of the army and far behind enemy lines. Their missions included gathering and delivering intelligence; capturing and bringing back prisoners; sabotaging railways, and destroying train cargos; disrupting road traffic and communications; and destroying enemy units and supply bases.

A long-range reconnaissance patrol advancing through the wilderness in the Rukajärvi sector in September 1942. (Sa-Kuva)

Three officers in conference before a decisive counter-strike: (from left) Captain Pentti Railio from the 33rd Infantry Regiment, armed with a Soviet PPS-43 Sudajev sub-machine gun (the Finns later copied it for their Pelti-kp M/44); Mannerheim Knight and *Sissi* company leader Lieutenant Lauri Törni; and Törni's right-hand man Lieutenant Holger Pitkänen. This image was taken north of Tolvajärvi on 27 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

FINNISH ARMOURED FORCES

Finland's armoured forces took part in only one combat mission during the Winter War. The battle of Honkaniemi saw the Finnish Tank Battalion rendered practically useless for the remainder of the war. During the Interim Peace, its Vickers tanks were upgraded with more effective 45mm guns captured from the Soviets and the Tank Battalion was reinforced with repatriated enemy tanks.

During the Summer War of 1941, the Tank Battalion fought in Ladoga Karelia and eastern Karelia as part of Lagus' 1st Jäger Brigade. Its efforts greatly impressed the Finnish command. As the rapid advance and victories produced large numbers of captured Soviet tanks, this enabled headquarters to upgrade the unit to an Armoured Brigade on 10 February 1942. By June the same year the Armoured Division had been formed.

The plan was to set up two battalions with T-26 tanks, and a third one with BT-42 assault guns, supported by heavy T-34 and T-28 tanks. The unit was later reinforced with an armoured anti-aircraft battery. During the Continuation War, the army also utilised nine T-34/76 *Sotka* (as the Finns referred to this tank) and nine T34/85 'long-barrelled *Sotka*', as well as two captured KV-1 tanks. Most of these were acquired as spoils of war, and only three captured T-34/76 tanks were bought from the Germans in 1944. In 1943, a new Assault Gun Battalion was formed using German Stug III, or *Sturmi* as the Finns called it. This proved to be a deciding factor in the defensive battles of 1944. Although only 29 of these tanks ever made it to the front, they ended up destroying 87 heavy enemy tanks for the loss of only eight guns.

A further 15 Panzer IV (Ausf. J) tanks were purchased from the Germans, but these did not arrive before the armistice was signed with the Soviets.

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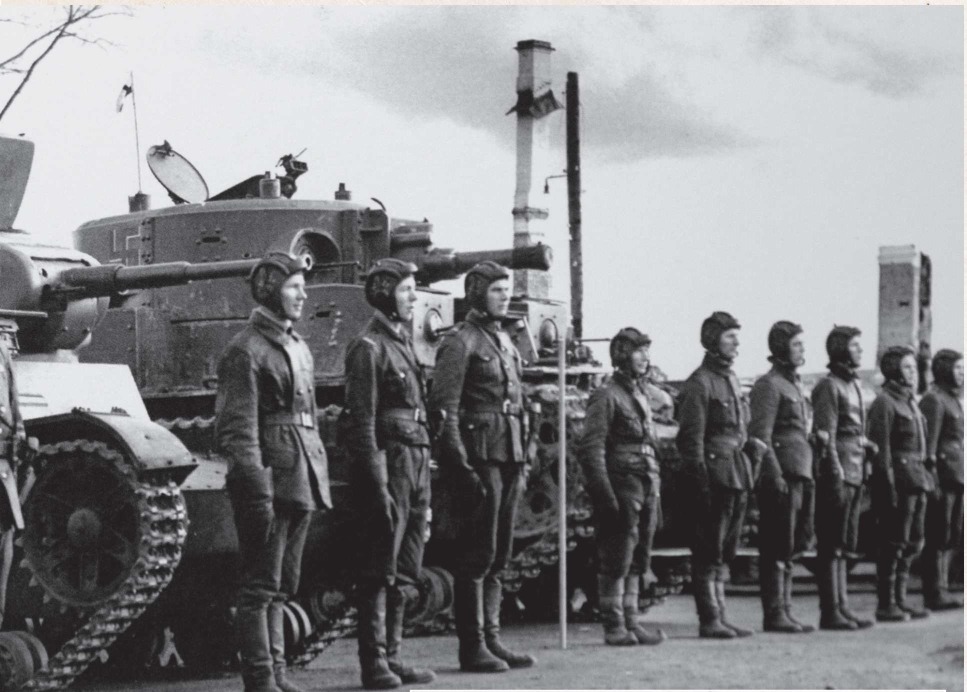
5 The Armoured Division's official emblem comprised these three arrows, symbolising the tank squad's conventional attack formation. (The Parola Armour Museum)



1 Men of the Tank Battalion in the victory parade at Äänislinna on 12 October 1942. In June 1941, the Finnish armoured forces had included for following:

Vickers: 25 (down from 32)
T-26 A: 10
OT-26: 2
T-26 B: 20
OT-130: 4
T-26 C: 4
T-28: 2
T-37 and T-38: 42
A-20 Komsomolets (armoured towing vehicle): 56
Various types of armoured cars: 21

By the end of 1942, the unit had been considerably reinforced with captured Soviet tanks. (The Parola Armour Museum)

2 A KV-1 model 1942 tank captured from the Soviets in spring 1942 near the Syväri River power plant. It still bears the impact marks in the front armour from Soviet T-34/85 gun shells from the battle of Portinhoikka in July 1944. This tank is currently on display in the Parola Armour Museum in Finland. (The Parola Armour Museum)

3 A captured KV-1 model 1942 in Finnish camouflage scheme, having already seen action in the summer of 1943. (The Parola Armour Museum)

4 Men of the 1st Jäger Brigade in joint task force exercises with the Tank Battalion's T-26s in Vitele, on 25 August 1941. (The Parola Armour Museum)

Despite these intensive efforts, some Soviet submarines still made it all the way through to the Åland archipelago, while the rest of the Baltic Fleet was bottled up in Leningrad and Kronstadt harbours practically until the end of the war. In order to further counter the threat of submersible vessels, a string of listening posts was set up across the gulf. These posts were to alert and guide the two guard boats stationed at Suursaari. For the rest of the war, the Finnish torpedo boats remained active against Soviet convoys supplying the bases at Lavansaari and Seiskari islands.

In November 1942, the torpedo boats launched a daring raid into the harbour of Soviet-controlled Lavansaari Island. There they proceeded to sink the well-armed gunboat *Krasnaya Znamya*. With a tonnage of 1,760 and five 130mm guns, this was the largest Soviet vessel to sail west from Kronstad during 1942.

Other than this daring victory, Finnish naval operations were limited by the practically non-existent air cover and the low firepower of their boats. It simply was not possible to fight the Baltic Fleet in the open, being so clearly outgunned. On the other hand, the Finnish Navy was successful at holding off Soviet landing attempts. In July 1942, a Soviet attack on the small, rocky island of Kalliosaari was decisively repelled. In the attempt the Soviets lost 16 motor torpedo boats and 230 men killed or captured, for a total of 17 Finnish dead.

FATHER SUNNY (*ISÄ AURINKOINEN*)

For the briefest of moments, the Finnish Army was able to field a heavy ISU-152 assault gun. The service record of this Soviet tank well describes the 'hand to mouth' regime that the Finns were forced to follow. The adventures of the Stug ace Börje Brotell with this tank *Father Sunny* are told in Brantberg's 2009 book *Sotasankareita*. Brotell recalls:

An IS-2 battle tank with its dominating 122mm gun in the Summa sector, on 17 June 1944. This latest addition to the Soviet arsenal had such thick frontal armour plating that even 75mm anti-tank guns failed to penetrate it. The Red Army employed these behemoths, as well as the ISU-152 assault guns employing the same chassis, on the Finnish front during the summer of 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

'I received orders to take two of my tanks and retrieve an abandoned ISU-152 from the Lake Leitimojärvi area. The new crew had two hours to familiarise themselves with this tank … We knew that behind a particular bend of the road two Soviet tanks had dug in for the wait. It was our mission to destroy these. I told the lieutenant commanding the ISU-152 that we should try to surprise them; "We shall advance slowly, once we see the tanks, we will open fire."'

Brotell's two tanks followed 30m behind, when the ISU-152 began shooting at targets through the forest just before the bend … 'This is how our men revealed themselves,' Brotell recalls … 'Once the assault gun reached the road bend, it was immediately twice fired upon. The shells hit the bottom half of the tank, and resulted in all hatches being flung open, from whence three of our men proceeded to dismount. Once a third round hit the tank, the driver finally also emerged. These men had been lightly wounded by flying shrapnel. Then the ISU-152 caught fire, and with its magazines still holding eight 60kg shells, it could well have exploded.' Brotell decided that he should definitely not try to bypass it … 'I stayed to follow what would happen next, and so it was that the tank was set alight and blew up. Afterwards, I could hear tank engines being started, and I was sure that the Soviets were about to assault our positions. This was not so, they had begun to retreat on the forested road and I gave my men orders to withdraw back to our lines.

THE FINNISH AIR FORCE

At the onset of the Winter War, the Finnish arsenal consisted of planes that were largely obsolete and no longer used by larger nations. Throughout the war, the air force employed 136 bombers, 272 fighters and 276 other aircraft. The Finns lost 62 aircraft and 75 pilots, with a further 26 wounded.

During the Interim Peace, the Finnish Air Force underwent modernisation and strengthening. New acquisitions were made. In August–September 1940, Germany reversed its earlier decision not to sell Finland arms. Even though it still refused to sell its newest aircraft, 55 Morane-Saulnier M.S. 406 fighter planes

The birth of the Finnish Air Force can be traced back to the Civil War of 1918 and to one of the first planes the Finns received, a Morane-Saulnier Parasol, donated by the Swedish Count Eric von Rosen. Von Rosen's personal emblem, the swastika, which had been painted on the sides of his gift, was then adopted as the official symbol of the fledgling Air Force. Shown here is a Fokker D.XXI, the best fighter the Finns possessed at the start of the Winter War. Even though outdated, it was still a valuable piece of equipment in the right hands. Finland had bought and self-manufactured a total of 42 planes. Fifty more were ordered in September 1939. By this point, it was obvious that the Fokker D.XXI was unable to meet the demands being made of it, but it was the only plane that was available on the market. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

During the wars, Finland could be justifiably proud of its meagre air force. The two top-ranking non-German pilots were both Finns, while the small nation sprouted a total of 96 aces (pilots who had downed five or more enemy planes). Despite their obsolete aircraft, they won their individual battles against numerically superior Soviet forces with access to the best planes that the Allies could muster: Yaks, Spitfires, Mustangs, and Airacobras. This image shows a Morane-Saulnier fighter being refuelled at Aunus airbase. The yellow stripe on the fuselage was the designation for the German Eastern Front. (Sa-Kuva)

These Fokker D.XXI fighters of the 32nd Flight Squadron protected the troops assembling on the Karelian Isthmus at the beginning of the Continuation War. (Sa-Kuva)

Throughout the wars, the Finnish Air Force was heavily outnumbered in planes and greatly disadvantaged because of its outdated aircraft. Still, Finnish pilots achieved notable success. For example, by 1943, Lieutenant Hans Wind had achieved 38½ aerial victories with a Brewster, the plane with which the entire US Air Force failed to down a single enemy. Despite being a fiasco in the eyes of the world, the Finns had achieved a kill:loss ratio of 32:1 with this aircraft. (Sa-Kuva)

and 30 Curtiss P-36 Hawk fighters were purchased, along with spare parts and supplies. Additional planes of both models were acquired later on.

As the Continuation War began, the Finnish Air Force employed the following fighter aircraft:

70 Fokker D.XXIs
42 Brewster Buffalos
39 Morane-Saulniers (16 to be received later)
32 Fiat G.50s
16 Gloster Gladiators
8 Curtiss Hawks (with more incoming)
9 Hawker Hurricanes
13 captured I-15 fighters (I-153, I-15, or I-15bis)

On 1 February 1943, Finland made a deal for the delivery of 30 modern Messerschmitt Bf 109 G-2 fighters; a total of 48 Bf 109 G-2s were eventually received. In the first half of 1944, Finland received 30 new Bf 109 G-6 planes, and a further 30 were delivered around the beginning of the Soviet 1944

offensive in Karelia. Additional aircraft were also received in ample numbers. The work of Finnish fighter planes became much harder during the Soviet offensive of 1944. At that time the exhausted pilots, who had to fly practically around the clock, found themselves badly outnumbered. During the conflict the Finns shot down a confirmed 1,621 Soviet planes while losing 210 aircraft of their own.

After the Continuation War ended and limitations were placed on Finland by the Allied Control Commission, the Finnish Air Force was to be used mainly for reconnaissance and to bomb German columns during the Lapland War.

The success of the Finnish Air Force was due to the skill of the pilots and their continuous honing of tactics. The pilots did not engage the enemy in unfavourable circumstances and used their own weaknesses against them. A good example is the special 'rocking chair' tactic that the clumsier, but quicker and faster climbing, Brewsters used to punish the more agile, but slower, Soviet I-153s. The Brewsters would gain height advantage and perform fast dives to attack the enemy. After accurate machine-gun fire, the pilots would disengage and ascend beyond the reach of their foe. This image shows Captain Jorma 'Joppe' Karhunen (1913–2002), who achieved 31½ aerial victories; it was taken at Suulajärvi base on 26 August 1943. (Sa-Kuva)

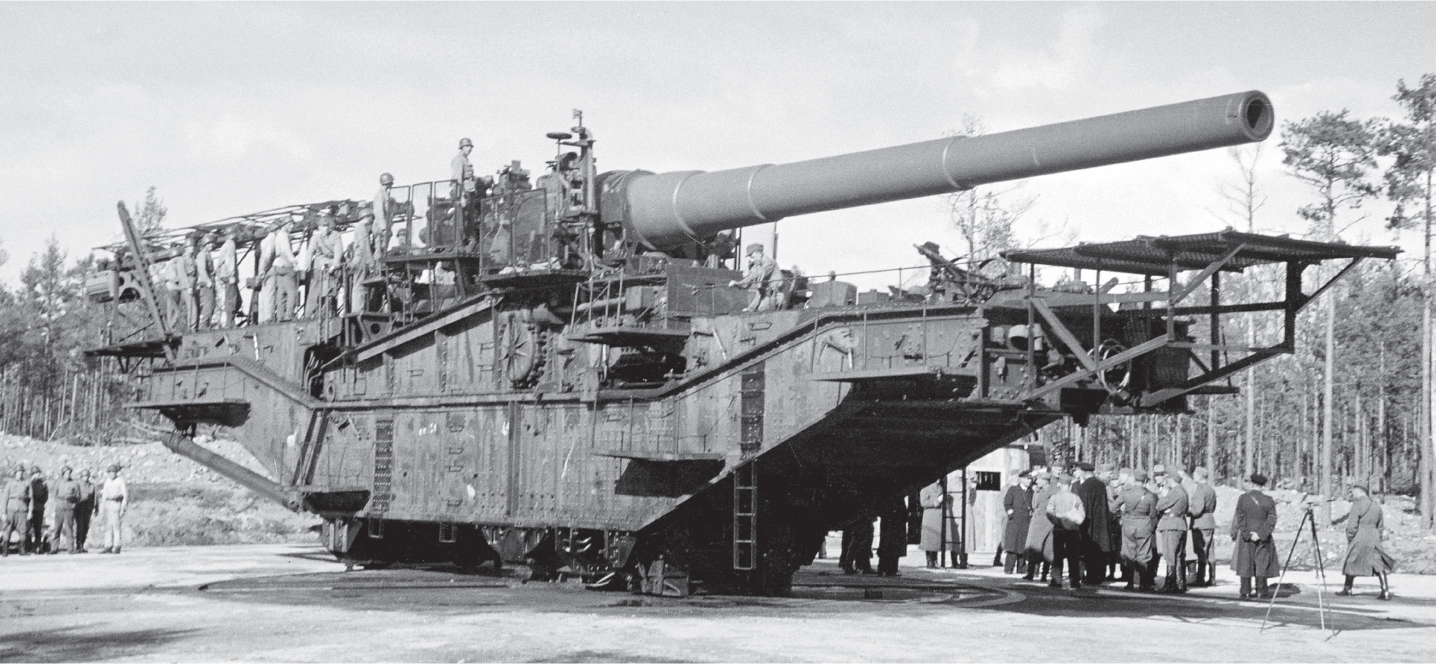
CHAPTER 8

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

During the Interim Peace, improvements to fortifications were carried out on all fronts. The Finnish commanders expected that there would be plenty of time to carry out such work in earnest should the German demise come nearer. When the latter did dawn, it was so sudden that no amount of effort could make up for the time lost. Initially, front-line commanders were reluctant to start improving their defences with extensive mine-laying operations. They believed that while the Germans continued to tie up most of the Soviet forces, their own ability to perform offensive manoeuvres would be more important.

After the assault phase (*Kesäsota*), Talvela had been dispatched to Germany to act as Finland's military envoy at the OKW. Although Finland also sent over a political contact, the latter often deferred to Talvela as military liaison due to the ongoing fighting. Talvela's main contact at the

A 20mm L-39 anti-tank rifle in a firing position during spring 1942. When the Winter War started in 1939, the so-called 'Elephant Rifle' was approved for use, but could not be manufactured in time. The weapon was based on the assumption that the Soviets would mainly use lightly armoured tanks. When these weapons finally arrived, they proved ineffective against the evolving tank designs. However, they were ideally suited to repelling enemy snipers or aircraft. During the years of trench warfare Finland's anti-tank weaponry was modernised. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)



During the years of trench warfare, both nations modernised their forces, although in Finland's case this was largely done by repairing captured Soviet equipment. This image shows the test-firing of a captured 305mm railway gun from Hanko on 21 September 1943. (Sa-Kuva)

OKW was to be Hitler's close confidant Alfred Jodl. In one of Talvela's first meetings with Hitler, the Führer expounded on the problems the Germans had faced during the first winter of Operation *Barbarossa*:

> Yes, you Finns, you know and understand winter, and you can use it to your advantage. To us the winter, the harsh Russian winter was something completely new. Our army had been equipped, and above all trained with the Western theatres in mind. Our weapons did not function during the winter. Our heavy tanks became immobile, even our infantry arms malfunctioned. In a way it can be said that our summer-time strike force lost its weapons. Please, imagine a person who has been trained to be a brilliant swordsman. Remove his sword and what good is he? … But we have learned and we have adapted … I have to admit it to you, that one time things did look rather threatening. December was hard. The enemy managed to make a couple of deep breaches in our lines and started strong partisan activity in our rear. Now we are used to this, our men fear partisans no more. We also now know how to take care of our weapons. By next winter we will again be completely in control. Now we have everything planned out and prepared, winter will not surprise us again. (Talvela, 1977)

The Stalingrad catastrophe in early 1943 proved Hitler's assertions wrong. The Finnish leaders now realised that Germany could not win the war against the Soviet Union. Consequently, the government started secretly

probing for a separate peace through foreign embassies. Such initiatives, and the ever more publicly expressed view of a 'separate war', resulted in a distinct cooling in Finnish–German relations.

On Valentine's Day 1943, Talvela and Jodl met unofficially to discuss the current situation. Jodl commented: 'If Finland is forced to calculate that Germany will lose this war, and [Finland] would once again have to face the might of the Soviet Union alone, then it is only natural to reach out to see what help is available, and I am sure the only place that any help might be coming from is America. Although, this help will only be of use if the Soviets have first been suitably drained in the final battle against the Germany.' Talvela took this as a hint that Finland should keep its options open. Jodl then went to point out that he could not believe things would get this desperate. He was convinced that Germany and Finland together would defeat the Bolsheviks, as Talvela recalled: 'When it came to a separate peace between Finland and the Soviet Union, he could not even see how it could be practically organised. After all, Dietl's army would then have to vacate Finland, leaving the country again alone and [undefended] against Bolshevism. In such circumstances, Finland's only guarantee of the country's continued existence would be the treaty they would sign with the Bolsheviks. And the Finns well know the worth of all such agreements.' A year and a half later this conversation proved to be highly prophetic.

In another such meeting in 1943, Talvela sat at dinner listening to a conversation between Göring and Hans Thomsen, the German ambassador to Washington. First Göring lamented that not all troops were as good as the Finns, and how well things would be going for the Germans if only Italy could have stayed neutral. He then told a disparaging story of their southern ally:

> Once Rommel had been touring the front far ahead of support, accompanied only by a couple of tanks. Suddenly he saw how in the distance around ten English tanks were approaching. He then observed proudly how before the enemy had fired a shot, the eager Italians got up from their dugouts and approached the enemy. Rommel was proud they were going to use the satchel charges to destroy the tanks. He then took his meagre formation and chased off the attacking enemy tanks, upon when Rommel realised his over-optimistic assessment as 700 Italian infantry had managed to make their desire to surrender known. (Talvela, 1977)

During the spring of 1944, relations hit rock bottom. Germany discontinued all aid to Finland, including grain and fuel shipments. No new deals were

made, and deliveries that had already been promised were delayed, citing reasons that appeared hollow. One contested issue was the Finnish SS-Battalion, whose men had signed a two-year contract with the Nazis. While Mannerheim would push for their return, the Germans would respond by asking for more volunteers. They clearly did not want to give up this very effective unit, which also tied the two nations closer together politically, a sentiment not at all lost on the Finns. When the volunteers' two-year term with the SS-Battalion ended, the Finns were very reluctant to let them take up another such contract. So when the troops were on leave in Finland, Mannerheim prohibited them from returning. The Germans tried to offset their need for these troops with considerable concessions elsewhere. In the end the government, and Mannerheim himself, were forced to take steps to bring Finland closer to Germany, and its war, once again in order to resume vital shipments. The start of the Karelian offensive on 9 June 1944 added urgency to the negotiations and finally, after the Finnish leadership indirectly threatened to surrender, Germany began massive arms shipments to Finland.

President Ryti's personally signed assurance to Hitler sealed the deal on 27 June 1944. He promised that neither he, nor his government, would seek peace with the Soviet Union, but would remain in the war at Germany's side. Once Hitler had been thus assured of Finland's continued involvement in the war, German aid once again flowed into Finland. During June 1944, 9,000 Panzerfaust anti-tank weapons and 500 Panzerschreck rocket-launchers were shipped from Estonia aboard torpedo boats. These proved invaluable in securing a defensive victory on the Karelian Isthmus. Hitler went even further in his efforts by committing German blood in order to prevent the total collapse of the Finnish front, in the form of one German infantry division and one assault gun brigade. The most effective of all such German task forces was the legendary Detachment Kuhlmey (*Gefechtsverband Kuhlmey*) whose tireless pilots played a key part in halting the Soviet onslaught.

By 1944, buoyed by the industrial might of America, Allied forces were finally ready to bring the war to an end. On 14 January 1944, the Red Army launched an offensive to relieve Leningrad. After a month of winter warfare, the besieging German forces were forced to retreat, and on 14 February the siege was lifted. Now the Soviets could once again supply and concentrate their troops in the city in preparation for an onslaught against the Finnish front. The demoralised German forces continued their retreat, withdrawing over the Narva River by early March. This now allowed Stavka to aim a hammer blow at the Karelian Isthmus – a strike that would enable them to

solve the Finnish matter in any way they pleased. In late January 1944, the US government went out of its way to recommend that Finland should try to withdraw from the war. This initiative was based on the expected military and diplomatic pressure from the Soviets. All Finnish efforts to reach a peaceful settlement ended on 22 April. Stalin had decided that it would be preferable to forcibly pacify Finland. The main attack would naturally have to happen on the Karelian Isthmus, where the desired outcome – complete surrender and the collapse of Finland – could be achieved in the quickest manner.

FINNISH FORCES IN 1944

During the war very little had changed regarding the organisation, equipment or tactics of Finnish forces. Their weaponry had been slightly modernised by employing captured Soviet equipment or by refitting the mostly outdated items bought from the Germans. The pride of the armed forces was its single armoured division. The acquisition of the most modern recoilless anti-tank weapons like Panzerfausts and Panzerschrecks began too late. These weapons would have been ideal for the densely forested Finnish battlefields, but the first of these weapons reached the front lines the very same day that the Soviet main offensive began. In 1942, the extensive discharge of troops had forced the divisions to reorganise. This had resulted in the third regiment of each unit being downsized into a single infantry battalion consisting of soldiers in older age groups. In contrast, the division's firepower had been improved by upgrading all the mortars and changing the 37mm anti-tank weapons to 75mm models. Each nine-man infantry squad was now supplemented with three Suomi sub-machine guns.

The developments south of Leningrad were to soon kick-start changes to Finnish troop deployments. Immediately after the siege had been lifted in 1944, the Finns started to reinforce the Karelian Isthmus. On 1 February, Mannerheim had given orders for Lagus' Armoured Division to become his personal reserves north

The forest has been cleared to provide clear killing ground in front of the anti-tank trench. Although these defensive measures were inadequate by the day's standard, they still improved the defenders' chances of controlling the oncoming enemy. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

of Viipuri. The consideration must have been that the denser than usual road network on the isthmus would allow these mobile forces to quickly deploy to any hotspot. A week later, he also ordered the majority of Pajari's 3rd Division to transfer from Uhtua to the Vammelsuu–Vuotas area. The unit was further reinforced with Task Force S, recalled from Kuusamo. The IV Army Corps (from 1 May 1944 under Laatikainen's command) on the eastern isthmus was given jurisdiction over Melander's Cavalry Brigade. These men had spent the last years fortifying the defences along the Vammelsuu–Taipale (VT) Line, but from now on they were to secure the coastline on Viipuri Bay. The 2nd Coastal Artillery Regiment guarding the shores of Lake Ääninen was to retreat, settling in for the defence of the Gulf of Finland. On 4 March, Mannerheim had reorganised the command structure on the isthmus, placing all the corps of the Army of the Isthmus directly under his headquarters, a solution that suited the slow pace of trench warfare.

By the end of May, the rest of Laatikainen's IV Army Corps on the western isthmus consisted of Major-General Ilmari Martola's 2nd Division and Major-General Johannes Sihvo's 10th Division. On the eastern isthmus, Siilasvuo's re-formed III Army Corps held the front. His forces included Major-General Niilo Hersalo's 15th Division as well as Colonel Lauri Maskula's 19th Brigade. Major-General Paavo Paalu's 18th Division was deployed just behind the front.

On 31 May 1944, the strength of the Finnish Armed Forces was 491,291 men, of whom 308,851 were infantry. On the Karelian Isthmus 43,670 soldiers guarded the front line, while 31,378 more formed Mannerheim's reserves. Despite all the transfers earlier in the spring, this most critical section of the front was manned by less than a quarter of all the available men. In hindsight, the transition of focus that was needed was greater than actioned, although it would have been a slow process regardless. The majority of the troops were currently stationed far away in eastern Karelia or northern Finland.

From the beginning of 1942, the intent was to concentrate the Fortification Corps on the Karelian Isthmus for the preparation of the rearmost defensive lines. Instead, they were soon required elsewhere, and so defensive work on these lines was irrevocably delayed. To begin with, the majority of these troops transferred to eastern Karelia to strengthen the road network for the demands of military use. Subsequently, they were then reassigned to Syväri and Maaselkä where defences had to be built from scratch. The focus of the specialist fortification teams did not move back to the Karelian Isthmus before the spring of 1944. At that time, due to the Soviets' considerably improved mobility and capacity to strike

Finnish positions on the VT Line. The works in this second line of defence had been overlooked for too long, and in general its fortifications were located all too close to the front line. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

back, it was finally deemed necessary to start building contingent fortified positions in the rear. On 18 November 1943, Mannerheim gave orders for the construction of the main defences of the Viipuri–Kuparsaari–Taipale (VKT) Line on the Karelian Isthmus and for the U Line at the north end of Ladoga. This was a slow and labour-intensive process and, as events were to demonstrate, the efforts were not focused precisely at the right places.

On 3 March, due to the increased Soviet activity, Mannerheim issued a critical directive requesting that special care be taken in preparing defensive capabilities across the Karelian Isthmus. This meant that the planned VT Line running just behind the front lines from Vammelsuu to Taipale had to be urgently completed. Although work on the VT Line had begun late in 1941, this construction project had been mainly carried out by the Army of the Isthmus' reserve formations currently on rotation out of front-line service. This proved a rather meagre workforce for such a critical endeavour. Finland, however, had expected to negotiate its way out of the war, rather than face another invasion.

At the beginning of 1944, the Finns had also started basic preparations for the VKT Line. This final defensive position before the mainland was born from the hard lessons of the Winter War, and was to run from Viipuri to Kuparsaari and from there along the ruins of the destroyed Mannerheim Line to Taipale on the eastern isthmus. It seems that serious efforts to fortify

Troop positions, June 1944

this position were never really started. Once it became clear that an invasion was imminent, more manpower was devoted to this fortification project. The 3rd and 18th divisions and the Cavalry Brigade in reserve were to labour on these defences until the start of the combined Soviet attack.

On 29 March 1944, after a difficult and snowy winter that had considerably delayed the works, Siilasvuo reported to the high command: 'The VT Line is nowhere close to being defensible, and with the resources at our disposal it will not be completed anytime in the near future.' As it turned out, the Finns had hardly any time to begin this construction project. The Karelian Isthmus had been the backwater of this conflict for so long that when the siege of Leningrad suddenly broke, suitable adjustments and reinforcements could not be made quickly enough. As late as the spring of 1944, Mannerheim had given permission for 9,500 front-line troops to go home for the crop-planting season. This work simply had to be done due to food shortages. He also wanted to decrease the reliance on the Germans, as they tended to weave promised grain shipments with requested military obligations. Now this part of the country was once again about to become the main theatre of war.

On 10 May, Mannerheim again stressed the importance of improving the fortifications. He also forewarned his commanders that he would be asking for staying power from his men when they were to face an attack by an enemy employing overwhelming material superiority. Despite this 'encouragement', segments of the VT Line were still unfinished when the Soviet attack started in June 1944. The fortifications were mostly adequate in the Vammelsuu and Kivennapa sectors as well as along the Viipuri–Leningrad railway. In contrast, elsewhere the firing lines had not always been cleared of underbrush and the granite boulders intended as anti-tank obstacles had not all been buried. It seems that Soviet intelligence was much better than during the ill-conceived planning sessions of the Winter War, as the upcoming breakthrough attempts were to focus directly on these weak spots.

SOVIET FORCES IN 1944

The Workers' and Peasants' Red Army had completely transformed itself during the previous three years of war. The low point for Stalin's forces can be said to have been in the latter half of 1941. This had resulted from a number of factors. Firstly, the German attack forced the Soviets to abandon all their western arms factories and food-producing areas. Secondly, massive mobilisation combined with poor supply and further loss of equipment during the battles had rendered its troops ineffective. Furthermore, the rifle divisions had been forced to give up their howitzers for centrally controlled specialised regiments, although this loss had been partially offset by the

increased number of mortars. Due to the high number of destroyed tanks, independent armoured formations had also been scrapped. Instead these units had to once again learn to operate as part of the infantry elements.

By the end of 1942, Soviet industry had recovered from the crisis. Production was further augmented with supplies from the Western Allies. The newly created divisional structures had reduced formation sizes to between 5,500 and 8,000 men. One exception was the so-called Guards divisions, a relic of the imperial tradition where units that had excelled on the battlefield were given this honorific title. Initially the new title was just a boost to morale, but by 1944 it also meant access to better equipment and training as well as more reinforcements. These elite Guards divisions were usually around 10,500 strong, and were often employed on the focus points of attack. Towards the end of the war, Guards Rifle corps containing strong armoured elements were employed. These select troops were to spearhead the attack against Finland.

While in general the number of men in the divisions decreased, the number of automatic weapons was considerably increased, to the point that regular bolt-action rifles were becoming a rarity. This development considerably improved the defensive firepower of units, while at the same time the smaller number of men lowered each formation's offensive capability. By 1944, the evolving Soviet doctrine stopped the use of wide-fronted infantry attacks, which had failed so catastrophically during the Winter War. Instead massed artillery was now to be used to blast open a route for the armoured spearheads. In their wake would follow the infantry, taking control of the captured terrain.

The Soviet Air Forces had learned a lot from the Luftwaffe, including tactics, and was now geared towards supporting the assaulting troops. The use of Ilyushin Il-2 Sturmovik ground-attack aircraft had increased tremendously. In general, the Red Army utilised the most technically modern war machines. For instance, the T-34 and Kliment Voroshilov (KV) tank ranges were some of the most effective of the war, although these newest models were used only sparingly on the Karelian Isthmus. However, most importantly Soviet commanders had learned their lessons during the long battles against the Finns and the Germans. Instead of being slaves to doctrine, they were now able to orchestrate flexible and devastatingly effective combined operations.

The conquest of Finland had been initiated at the conference in Tehran, which ended on 1 December 1943. Here, the Allied Powers had agreed that the Soviet Union would launch a simultaneous attack against the Germans coinciding with the planned invasion of France. The purpose of this offensive

An immobilised Soviet KV-1 model 1942 (right) and a T-34 model 1942. They were stopped just in front of the Finnish lines near the Syväri power plant in April 1942. They are guarded by a soldier holding a Suomi sub-machine gun standing next to ready satchel charges. Both tanks were repaired and taken into the Finnish arsenal, where they took part in the defensive victories of 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

(1897–1955)

LEONARD GOVOROV
MARSHAL OF THE USSR
LENINGRAD FRONT

Leonard Alexandrovich Govorov started his career as a cadet in 1916 and graduated a year later from the Officers' Artillery School. During the Russian Civil War he fought for both sides. He had first been conscripted into the tsarist White Army but managed to escape in October 1919 and soon volunteered for the Red Army. He commanded an artillery battery for the rest of the war. After a ten-year tenure as a regimental and battalion commander, Govorov graduated from the Military Academy in 1938.

Govorov was the chief of staff for the Seventh Army's artillery and was complimented for breaching the Mannerheim Line during the Winter War. At the beginning of the Great Patriotic War, he held several army and artillery commands. From June 1942 onwards, he was the commander of the Leningrad Front. Govorov was promoted to marshal on 18 June 1944 after his Leningrad Front had breached the VT Line. Some have conjectured that this was done so that the Soviets could accept Finland's expected surrender with equal representation to Marshal Mannerheim. This never happened.

In January 1945, Govorov was made a Hero of the Soviet Union. After the wars, he rose to be the supreme commander of Soviet anti-aircraft troops and acted as the vice-minister of defence. Govorov died on 19 March 1955. His cremated remains are buried in the walls of the Kremlin.

was to tie in as many of Hitler's forces as possible and to prevent their transfer back to the Western Front. At the beginning of April 1944, the Western Allies informed Stalin that the attack would commence within two days of 31 May. The final decision was to be taken closer to the time and would depend on the weather and tide conditions. Stavka agreed with this date and promised to start an offensive of its own at the same time, but did not volunteer any information on the direction of the attack. When the D-Day landings were already underway, the Soviets informed their allies that their own attack would start on an important front by mid-June and that a month later this operation would escalate into an assault on all fronts. This promise now tied their hands, leaving only one month to resolve their issues with Finland.

Towards the end of May, Soviet air strength operating over the Karelian Isthmus was estimated at 1,200 planes. During this period, information reached the Finnish commanders that two new armies and one army corps had been transferred to the area. Unfortunately, due to several minor but obvious factual errors in this intelligence report, it was dismissed as unreliable. Afterwards it became clear that, on the whole, this report had been accurate. Despite the increased Soviet activity, the casualty ratio during May was still lower than could have been expected just before a major offensive: 195 dead, 17 missing and 940 wounded. Ultimately, the actual start of the Soviet main offensive seemed to take everybody at the Finnish high command by surprise; the men at the front, however, knew all too well what was coming.

The concentrated attack against Finland was so demanding that all other Soviet operations had to be temporarily halted and could not be continued for another two weeks. After this, the Red Army was to proceed inexorably all the way to Berlin. In effect the planned invasion of Finland had to be resolved quickly, allowing the armoured and guards divisions to be diverted against the Germans.

The Finnish front line ran along the edge of the area the Finns had captured during the offensive phase of 1941. At the time, the goal of both sides had been to reach the narrowest part of the isthmus, where defences could be better concentrated. The downside of taking up these 65km-long positions was that the terrain would favour the attacker. During the autumn of 1941, this had not been a major concern for the Finns as it was expected that the Germans would soon force the Red Army to surrender. In truth, the main defensive positions along the front line were just trenches protected by scattered obstacles and the occasional dugout to the rear. For their defence, the Finns could only spare five divisions and two brigades, while against them the Soviets had amassed five rifle corps. There was never going to be enough artillery or ammunition to halt the enemy hordes.

This time, having learnt the bitter lessons from the Winter War, the Soviets took their attack preparations seriously. The operations on the isthmus were preceded by a thorough phase of reconnaissance and planning. The defences at the front line were well known to Stavka, while spies and extensive aerial photography provided information about positions deep behind the lines. During the spring of 1944, more than 600 aerial photography missions were flown. Based on the images taken, detailed maps were made to aid the tacticians.

The attack against the Karelian Isthmus was handed over to the Leningrad Front under Leonard Govorov. The Leningrad Front headquarters understood well that solely having superior numbers did not guarantee victory. The officers and key elements spent the preceding months practising the operation south-west of Leningrad, as this area greatly resembled the Finnish front. Stavka gave up its large reserve formation, Gusev's Twenty-First Army, and Govorov planned to send this formation towards Viipuri. Exploiting any breakthrough achieved by Gusev would be the heavily

(1894–1957)

DMITRY GUSEV
COLONEL-GENERAL
TWENTY-FIRST ARMY

Dmitry Nikolayevich Gusev graduated from the Tsar's Ensign School in 1917. Two years later he joined the Red Guards, taking part in the uprising and fighting on the eastern front. On account of Stalin's purges, Gusev, like so many of his contemporary fellow officers, was only able to receive formal higher military training well after World War II had ended, finally graduating in 1950.

In the course of the winter of 1940, Gusev acted as chief of staff for the Baltic Military District. When the Great Patriotic War broke out, he transferred to become chief of staff of the Forty-Eighth Army. In October 1941, he was promoted to the same role at the Leningrad Front headquarters. On 28 April 1944, Gusev was made the commander of the Twenty-First Army. Two months later, once his troops had passed the remains of the Mannerheim Line on the Karelian Isthmus, he was promoted to colonel-general.

When his Twenty-First Army approached the VKT Line, Gusev's force consisted of over six rifle corps: 16–18 divisions, four armoured brigades, eight tank or assault-gun regiments, over 100 field artillery batteries and 'Stalin's Organ' (Katyusha) rocket-launcher regiments. Nearly 800 aircraft were dedicated to supporting his forces from the air. After the war, Hero of the Soviet Union Gusev held several military district commands. He resigned from active service in September 1955.

reinforced Twenty-Third Army, led by Lieutenant-General Alexander I. Tsherepanov. The focus of Leningrad Front's attack was to be the Valkeasaari crossroads, where the armoured spearhead was supported by strong assaults on both flanks. The resulting broad attack would help tie in the Finnish defenders on a wide front and most likely open up new gaps in their lines. The assault was to continue without halting, straight towards the next set of obstacles at the VT Line.

At the point of attack, the Red Army expected to count on 500 tanks whereas the Finns had none. Between their two armies, the Soviets had a total of 24 infantry divisions, two artillery divisions, five artillery brigades, eight assault-gun brigades, five armoured brigades and 17 tank battalions. This translated into a total of 260,000 men, 630 tanks or assault guns and nearly 7,500 artillery pieces. In addition, practically the entire 1st Air Army was at Govorov's disposal with scores of ground bombers, 600 fighters and 400 heavy bombers. The Finns, in contrast, had fewer than 44,000 men at the front and immediate reserves of a further 32,000. The disparity in equipment was even starker.

A second front of attack, with partially a diversionary focus, was to be launched by Meretskov's Karelian Front about a week later on the Aunus and Maaselkä isthmuses. Lieutenant-General Alexey Krutikov's Seventh Separate Army was to attack along the Syväri line, while the assault on the Maaselkä front would come from Gorelenko's Thirty-Second Army. Meanwhile, the rest of Meretskov's Karelian Front, including the Fourteenth Army in the Murmansk area, the Nineteenth Army near Kantalahti and the Twenty-Sixth Army near Uhtua, were not to take part in this stage of the offensive. Meretskov's path to Finland was blocked by II Army Corps in the direction of Maaselkä and by Aunus Group on the Syväri front. At this stage Aunus Group still contained both the VI and V Army corps. Soon the situation on the Karelian Isthmus dictated the severe depletion of both these defensive lines, resulting inevitably in a planned retreat by the Finns.

OPPOSITE
An L-39 20mm anti-tank rifleman on sentry duty about 7km north-east of Ohta, along the line where the Soviet attack was to be concentrated. These feeble defences were soon to receive thousands of shells and the attacks of Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army. The weapon in question was meant to be transported by the infantry, but its hefty weight of 51.4kg soon accorded it the name 'Elephant Gun'. The ten-bullet clip allowed a rate of fire of roughly 15 shots per minute. (Sa-Kuva)

CHAPTER 9

ATTACK ON THE KARELIAN ISTHMUS

In preparatory planning, the Soviet strategists calculated that prior to their advance they would have to destroy some 550 targets in the way of Twenty-First Army's path of attack. They concluded that due to the fortified nature of some of these targets, it would be impossible to destroy more than 300 of them in one day, as the thick smoke and dust clouds would prevent further work by artillery observers. Based on this calculation, it was decided that the preliminary bombardment of the key targets should commence a day before the all-out attack. In order to keep the focus of the attack a surprise, all the other targets along the whole length of the isthmus would also be shelled.

Once battle had been joined, the Finns captured documents revealing that the Red Army had grouped at least 100 artillery pieces for each kilometre of the front. In addition, they

A Maxim machine gun being deployed at the VT Line at Liippua in June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

A Finnish soldier throwing a grenade in the Mainila–Valkeasaari sector. (Sa-Kuva)

commanded the stationary heavy coastal guns as well as the guns of the Baltic Fleet. The Finns had a total of 268 guns, which equated to five pieces per kilometre. In addition to complete air superiority, the Soviet artillery outgunned the Finns by at least 20:1. Furthermore, the Finnish artillery was spread more or less evenly across the front, whereas the Soviets could amass their equipment on the attack's focus. For instance, in the Valkeasaari sector the Soviets were to employ 400 guns per kilometre. Before the barrage started, the Finns had little idea of these concentrations, and so had not taken any special measures to strengthen their defences.

The Leningrad Front commander Govorov had dictated that the attack should be spearheaded by the forces of Gusev's Twenty-First Army. Although the Twenty-Third Army would create diversionary shelling and attacks along the front, its primary task was to exploit any breakthrough achieved by their comrades. On the coastal sector, the Twenty-First Army's attack was to be carried out by the 72nd and 109th Rifle divisions of Lieutenant-General Ivan Alfyorov's 109th Rifle Corps. These men were further reinforced by an additional tank and one assault-gun regiment, while the 286th Rifle Corps remained behind them for the second wave of the attack. Alfyorov's mission was to attack along the coast, advancing through Terijoki towards the VT Line. On their right, the glory of being at the centre of the Soviet spearhead had been given to Lieutenant-General Nicholas Simonyak's 30th Guards Rifle Corps. The task of sundering the Finnish defences had been granted to three strong formations, the elite 45th, 63rd and 64th Guards Rifle

divisions. Simonyak's already potent force had been further reinforced by three Tank brigades and copious amount of artillery. On the Guards' other flank was Major-General Michael Busarov's 97th Rifle Corps, comprising the 381st, 358th and 178th Rifle divisions. The plan was that once the 97th Rifle Corps had breached the line, its command would pass over to the Twenty-Third Army who would follow in its wake.

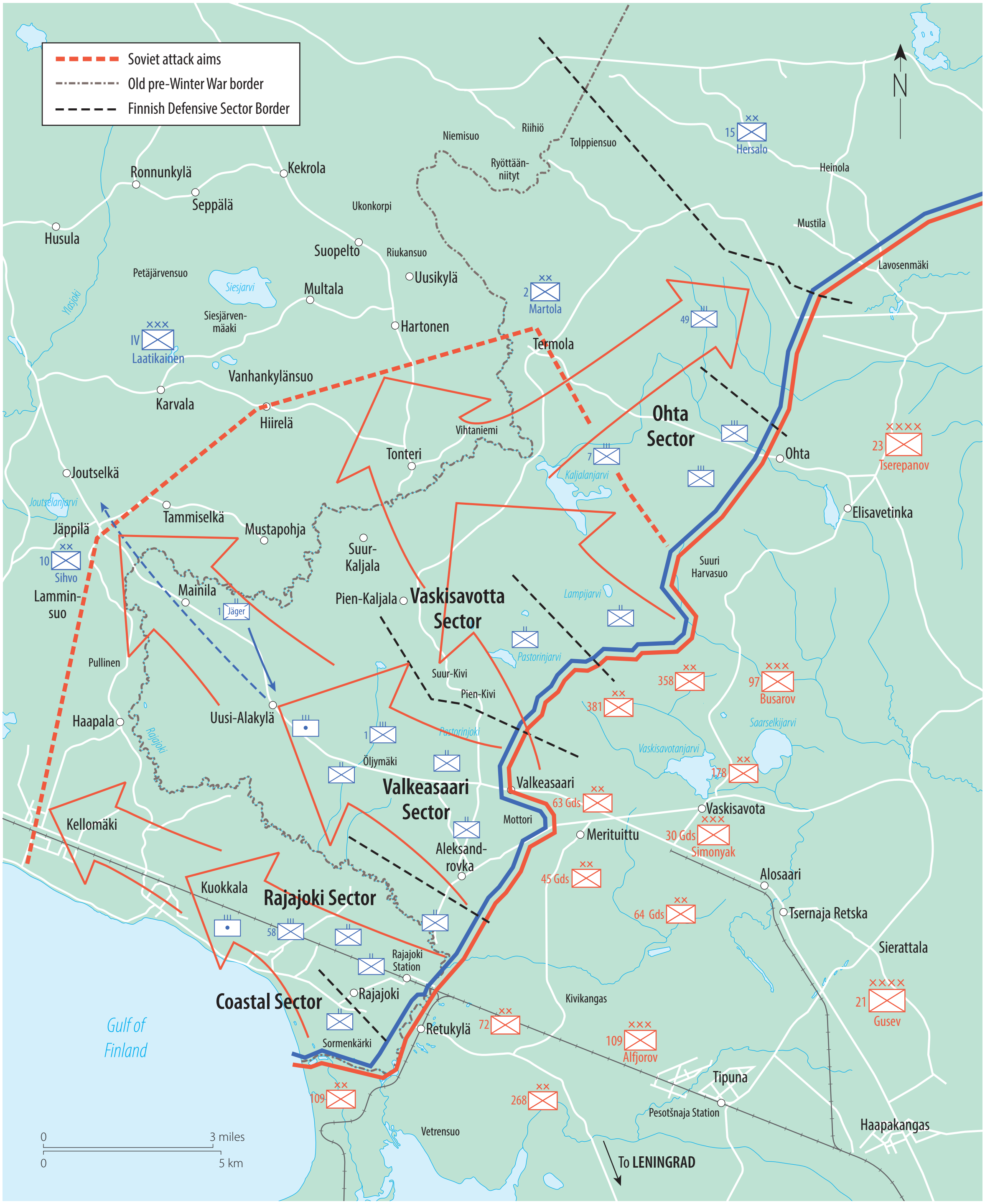
On 9 June at 06:00, three days after the Allied invasion of Normandy, the Leningrad Front's onslaught began with a tremendous preparatory bombardment. The Karelian Isthmus' main defences were hit by gargantuan shelling, supported by a bombing campaign from more than a thousand planes. The air strikes were not limited to the front, but also liberally spread to the supply areas and roads at the rear of the defences. The immediate effect of the shelling was devastating: minefields were neutralised, dugouts caved in, forward observation posts were lost and all the telephone connections to the regimental commands and beyond were cut.

By 18:00, after the overwhelming bombardment, Red Army forces started to probe for an opening in the Finnish defences. By the first evening the temporary breaches had all been sealed, except in the Valkeasaari sector where the front was still contested. The Soviet artillery continued its fire missions throughout the night, and the next morning intensified the shelling again. At the end of the day, Laatikainen had sent the following missive to Mannerheim: 'At the mouth of the Rajajoki River, and at Mottori the enemy still maintains a foothold in our lines. All their attacks have been repelled in the direction of the Vaskisavotta and Ohta roads'. (Raunio and Kilin, 2013) Despite this and other reports, headquarters failed to send reinforcements and to man the positions along the VT Line. This oversight would soon cost the Finns dearly.

Estimates about the intensity of the Soviet preparatory bombardment have varied greatly. The Soviet military historian M. Frolov has calculated that on 10 June 1944, the Soviet artillery fired 354,000 shells into the Rajajoki–Valkeasaari area. This was the heaviest bombardment of the war so far. In contrast, the defending Finnish 10th Division's two artillery regiments could only return 3,700 shells of their own. During the day, the quartermasters finally delivered the first Panzerfausts and Panzerschrecks to the anti-tank squads on the front. There was no time to acquaint the men with these new weapons. They would simply have to figure them out the next time a Soviet tank rumbled towards them.

Early on 10 June, hundreds of forays from Soviet aircraft and scores of heavy tanks buoyed the renewed infantry assault forward. The well-planned artillery strikes destroyed divisional headquarters and supply areas in the rear. In general,

Leningrad front attacks, June 1944



the coordination of the Soviet armoured spearheads and artillery was superb. The advancing troops planted flags into captured terrain features to indicate the position of their own forces, while signal flares were used to mark desired fire missions. The remaining defenders in the Valkeasaari sector were soon overwhelmed. The defending elements of Martola's 2nd Division were easily brushed aside while significant parts of Sihvo's 10th Division had fled immediately after the bombardment ended. To Sihvo's dismay his men had been forced to abandon practically all of their heavy weapons. Those not already been destroyed by the Soviets had to be left in place, as most of the 10th Division's tractors were still on loan to the fortification projects in the rear.

Immediately, the Soviet 45th and 63rd Guards Rifle divisions poured through the gap. By noon the breach had been widened by about 10km, stretching inland all the way to the bend in the Rajajoki River. The Finnish 1st Jäger Battalion, led by Major Vetre, was given orders to recapture the lost Uusi Alakylä hamlet. This proved a tall order for a lightly armed infantry battalion, lacking any artillery support, fighting a Soviet spearhead consisting of hundreds of heavy tanks. The Jäger soon had to retreat to the other side of the river, but there was no time to blow up the bridge. During the afternoon Soviet forces crossed the intact bridge and started folding up the Finnish defensive line in both directions. Until now, in order to curb panic, the civilian population had been allowed to remain in the area. These poor people now fled towards the VT Line through the heavy enemy shelling.

Martola's 2nd Division, on the left flank of the Sihvo's 10th, had already withstood several Soviet attempts to rush their defences. After the loss of

(1895–1987)

ALBERT PUROMA
COLONEL
1ST JÄGER BRIGADE

During World War I, Albert Aleksander Puroma served as a sailor and was captured and held by the Germans, who at that time considered Finland a hostile nation. Luckily for Puroma, he was offered a route to freedom by joining with his volunteer compatriots to train in the 27th Royal Prussian Jäger Battalion.

Puroma had clearly found his calling, and during the Finnish Civil War he commanded a White Guard squad during the battles for Viipuri. After the conflict, Puroma remained in service, first rising to the rank of company commander and later taking responsibility for the army district.

During the Winter War, Puroma worked in Harald Öhquist's II Army Corps as chief of both the Civil Guards and the Karelian Isthmus military districts.

When the Continuation War started, Puroma became commander of the 12th Infantry Regiment of the 6th Division in the Salla region. He commanded his men in the breakthrough attack at Kiestinki and at Louhivaara. For his efforts, Puroma was made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross in October 1942. Subsequently, his regiment marched south to Karhumäki in 1943.

In the last year of the war, Puroma was made the commander of the 1st Jäger Brigade of the Finnish Armoured Division. When the Soviet offensive began, Task Force Puroma was formed. This 3,100-strong unit was hastily trained in anti-tank warfare. His unit took part in the bloodiest fight of the wars whilst regaining the VKT Line at Kuuterselkä.

During the Lapland War, Puroma led the 6th Division. Together with Lagus' Armoured Division, his men attacked towards Rovaniemi through Puolanka and Ranua. From November 1944 onwards his force again had the call sign Group Puroma. Puroma remained in service after the wars, becoming the commander of the Border Guards in 1949. He retired in 1956 having reached full service age.

Valkeasaari, the pressure only increased on their stretched front, forcing Martola to slightly draw in the edges of his line. Artillery Captain Ulkuniemi writes in his book *Tykistö Taistelussa* about the southern flank of the division: 'The weakest of men start deserting their posts, shocked by the murderous fire. Already at 07:00 some individuals, and soon dispersed groups, started to stream back past our foremost batteries. The best of men, continued the determined, albeit uneven, battle against the superior enemy'. (Ulkuniemi, 1952)

Finnish Army headquarters was not yet fully apprised of the vast size of the Soviet forces, nor of the focus of their attack. Siilasvuo's III Army Corps was therefore given orders to remain and hold the front on the eastern edge of the isthmus. In contrast, Mannerheim had no choice but to give Laatikainen's IV Army Corps permission to start its retreat to the VT Line. By now, the 10th Division had shown suspicious signs of weakening; in particular, the 1st Infantry Regiment had acquitted itself badly by deserting its posts and fleeing, despite the efforts of the officers. Consequently, the loss of a large portion of the division's officers and artillery rendered the unit now unfit for the front and it had to be relieved. This forced Mannerheim

A Stug 40 Ausf. G (Ps531-17) from the Finnish Assault Gun Battalion on its way to counter-attack at Kivennapa on 13 June 1944. The fact that the Stugs continued to serve the Finnish Army until 1966 speaks volumes about the effectiveness of this compact war machine. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

to commit the last of his reserves on the western isthmus to holding their section of the VT Line. Thus, he ordered the Border Guard Brigade to take hold of the coastal segment, while Pajari's 3rd Division was to relieve the 10th Division on the Kivennapa area. Lagus' Armoured Division was also to relocate into the Muola–Kivannapa area. Based on the worsening reports during the afternoon, Mannerheim issued further orders for 4th Division and 3rd Brigade to be transferred to the isthmus with utmost speed.

The Soviet attacks at Valkeasaari and other sectors of the main line had been completely overwhelming. The few Finnish divisions simply did not have enough resources to resist a total of ten Soviet corps pushing forward. Army officials, who controlled all the reserves, were too far to the rear and could not keep up with the rapidly developing situation. For instance, during one chaotic morning, Laatikainen, just 30km to the rear, was forced to ask the Finnish Air Force to find out where the enemy and his own men, the IV Army Corps, actually were.

THE VAMMELSUU–TAIPALE (VT) LINE

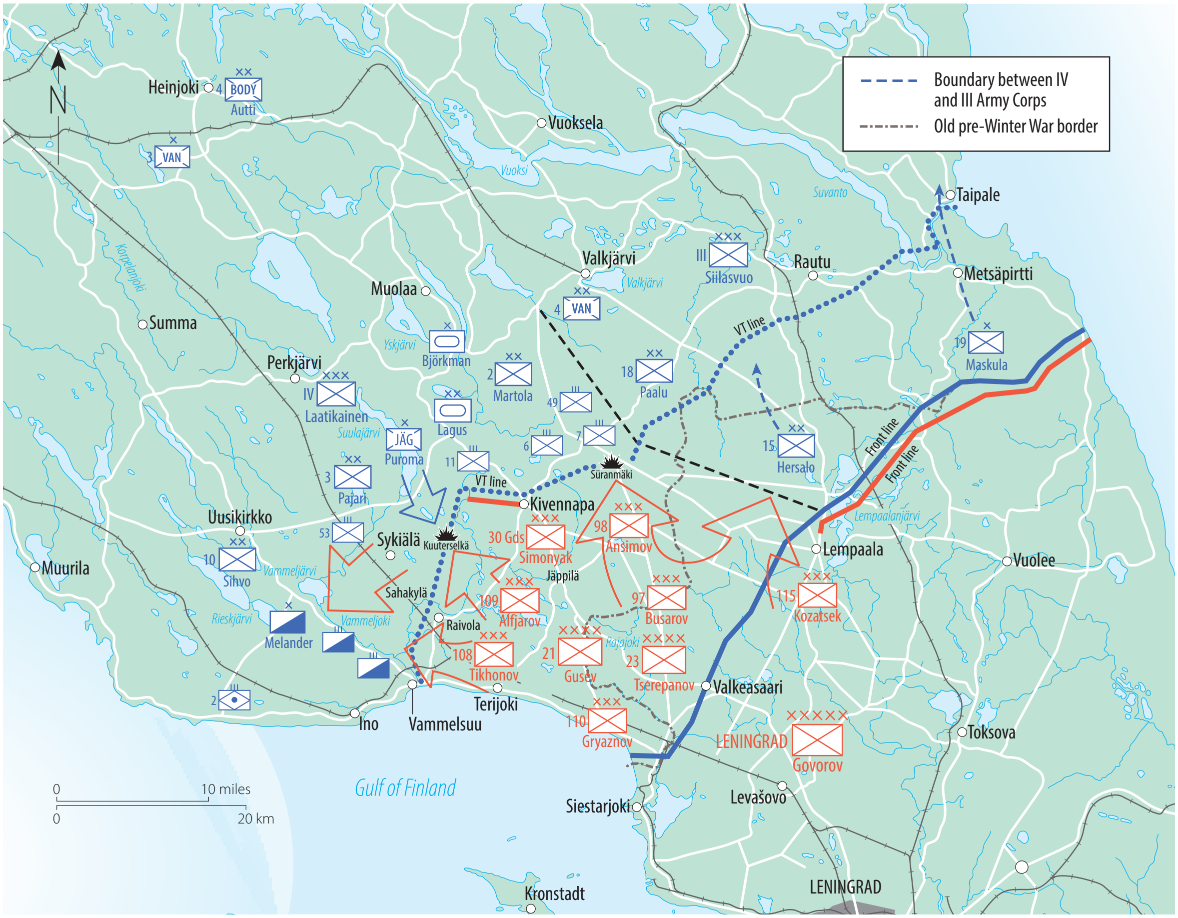
It became immediately clear that the VT Line had been built too close to the front line. The close proximity enabled the Soviets to continue their attacks unhindered by the terrain and without even pausing to regroup between the two positions. The defenders were left with no time to bring any new reserves into play. The Soviet heavy artillery did not even need to relocate. By raising their barrel elevation, they could shell the new defensive positions from where they stood.

Such a fast and decisive collapse of the defences spooked the war-weary Finns. Their will for battle was rapidly vanishing, which manifested itself in a considerable number of desertions. Meanwhile the Red Army's losses were relatively low at well under 10 per cent, although considering the vast numbers at their disposal that still meant that some 10,000 Soviet soldiers became casualties each day.

After the Red Army broke through in the Valkeasaari sector, the Finnish headquarters finally understood that this was a major Soviet offensive. Once the artillery barrage had finished, it had taken Gusev's Twenty-First Army only seven hours to force the Finnish first line of defence to collapse. At this stage, it was no longer possible to regain the front line. At 14:30 on 11 June, orders went out for all the Finnish troops to regroup at the VT Line.

While the rest of their forces retreated, Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade (now committed in its entirety) was to perform a localised counter-attack from Kivennapa on the flank of the enemy already passing the Jäppilä crossroads. Despite the fact that the rapidly dispatched assault could not wait to receive

Battles for the VT Line, 14–15 June 1944



any artillery support, the Jäger did manage to halt the initial Soviet advance. Captain Lauri Jäntti describes the events:

> The first [KV heavy tank] appears around the road bend, approaching our positions. Corporal Jokela, the nearest anti-tank gunner, fires his brand-new weapon. This anti-tank gun has just been towed in from Viipuri, and is discharged for the first time in combat. The shot glances off the enemy armour. Immediately the [KV heavy tank] starts to rotate its turret towards Corporal Jokela's position, his muzzle flash has given him away. The squad's second-in-command, Sergeant Salmi, and his men now haul the gun carriage around by hand. This is the only way to bring the barrel to bear on the enemy tank at the bottom of the hill … it's a matter of seconds … who will shoot first … fire! It is a direct hit, in the middle of the turret just

OPPOSITE
The alarm has sounded: the Soviets have already reached the VT Line. Determined defenders face the tanks of the Guards division with their hand grenades in June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

> below the barrel … and not a moment too soon, as the [KV heavy tank] has finally rotated towards the Finns. (Jäntti, 1956)

Seven heavy Soviet tanks were destroyed during this first encounter. Three hours later, despite their victory, the renewed Soviet attack forced the Jäger to start their own extraction. Puroma's brigade continued in a fighting withdrawal in order to buy more time for IV Army Corps to retreat. This sacrifice cost the Jäger nearly 800 men dead and wounded.

Meanwhile on 11 June, the 10th Division fought rearguard actions with the troops it still was able to control, retreating beyond the VT Line all the way to Lake Vammeljärvi. By now, 1st Jäger Brigade had also given ground in front of the overpowering enemy and had already decamped past this prepared line of defence. As night fell, these retreats forced Mannerheim to commit the whole of Lagus' Armoured Division in order to maintain control of the VT Line. The Finnish headquarters recalled those men who were still on leave for agricultural work on 11 June. They were told to arrive back at their units no later than 20 June.

By 12 June, the majority of Laatikainen's IV Army Corps had withdrawn into positions on the VT Line. Just east of Kivennapa, Martola's 2nd Division doggedly managed to hold on, but by the evening they too were given orders to retreat. On

(1887–1979)

IVAN ALFYOROV

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
109TH RIFLE CORPS

Ivan Prokopyevich Alfyorov had his baptism of fire during the Russian Civil War on the Petrograd Front. Afterwards followed several battalion commands, as well as a lengthy period at the Red Army's general headquarters, including a lectureship in tactics at the Soviet Military Academy. In July 1942 Alfyorov transferred to the Olhava Front to lead the 288th Rifle Division. Between 1942 and 1943 he served as commander of the 6th Guards Rifle Corps. Alfyorov led the 109th Rifle Corps from 6 January 1944 until the end of the war. He was promoted to lieutenant-general in February 1944 and was made a Hero of the Soviet Union for his achievements in breaching the Finnish front line and VT Line. Alfyorov retired from service in 1951.

the whole, this division and its commander had performed well. Had the neighbouring 10th Division done likewise, the Soviet attack might well have been slowed considerably. In any case, the pre-war assertion that the front line could hold for weeks against any enemy had been proven sheer fantasy. The magnitude and ferocity of the Soviet onslaught highlighted the point that the enemy was reaching for a fast and complete settlement on the Finnish front. Mannerheim and his staff now had to play out all their defensive actions against this stark backdrop. Without further delay, the 17th Division and the 20th Brigade were ordered to disengage from Syväri and transfer to the Karelian Isthmus. Siilasvuo's III Army Corps also retreated on the right flank, while those forces to the east of Lake Lempaalanjärvi (Colonel Lauri Maskula's 19th Infantry Brigade and elements of Hersalo's 15th Division) were to still hold their ground.

The next day, the Red Army continued its preparations for crushing the VT Line. Govorov had received fresh intelligence that the main body of the Finnish forces had now gathered at Kivennapa. He therefore altered Twenty-First Army's focus to the more weakly defended Kuuterselkä area. This 30km-wide sector was guarded only by Pajari's 3rd Division. Govorov also ordered Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army to simultaneously breach the defences in the Siiranmäki sector. In this way Soviet forces would bypass the Finnish concentrations at Kivennapa from east and west.

Based on some very accurate intelligence, the next Soviet attack bore down directly at the three weakest points of the VT Line: Sahakylä, Kuuterselkä and Siiranmäki. In all these sectors the fortification works were badly behind schedule. In places there were no dugouts, fighting trenches or connections to the rear, and barbed-wire obstacles were missing or incomplete.

Initially, Melander's Cavalry Brigade succeeded in repelling the attack along the coast at Vammelsuu. However, due east of them at Kuuterselkä, Pajari's 3rd Division was faced with vastly superior enemy forces. Along a poorly fortified, 7km stretch of the VT Line, only a single Finnish battalion faced the combined might of two Soviet divisions and their strong supporting armoured forces. After a preliminary bombardment comparable to that which the Red Army had earlier unleashed on the front line, a mere battalion could not halt this tide, and by midday the Finns were forced to retreat from the commanding ridgeline at Kuuterselkä.

In desperation, Pajari's 3rd Division threw in its last reserves in order to limit the breach. This in turn forced the Cavalry Brigade to extend its responsibility for the defences in the Sahakylä area. Pajari's troops were simply stretched too far and were too few to stop the tide. Although

OPPOSITE
Over the previous ten days, the Finnish Army had retreated nearly 100km in the so-called 'Isthmus Run'. If the VKT Line fell, the gates of Finland would be wide open to the enemy. Here, on 23 June 1944, men from the 2nd Battalion of the 11th Infantry Regiment dig in at the remains of the Winter War defences on both sides of road to Kääntymä, about 25km east of Viipuri. (Sa-Kuva)

ILMARI MARTOLA
MAJOR-GENERAL
2ND DIVISION

(1896–1986)

Ilmari Armas-Eino Martola's first combat experience was at the Misse River in 1916. When the Jäger later returned to Finland, he acted as squad commander. From 1919 to 1921, Martola studied in the French Military Academy and in 1928 he served as Finland's military attaché in Paris. From 1933 Martola was the chief of staff for the Civil Guards.

During the Winter War he took part in the defensive battles on the Karelian Isthmus as the commander of the 1st Division. At the start of the Interim Peace, Martola returned to his previous post with the Civil Guards.

In 1942, Martola became the commander of the 2nd Division on the Karelian Isthmus. He received his Mannerheim Cross in June 1944, the only division commander to receive this high accolade for defensive efforts against the Red Army offensive. On 7 July 1944, in midst of the Vuosalmi battles, Mannerheim had Martola swap roles with the demoted Major-General Blick, with Martola becoming the new commander of VI Army Corps. From September to November 1944, Martola acted as a second foreign minister for Finland.

From 1956 to 1958 Martola was employed as the Military Advisor to the Secretary General of the United Nations. In 1966 he began a three-year post as the commander of UN forces in Cyprus. Martola was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general in 1966 and to the rank of general of infantry in 1982.

Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade again was hastily sent to the area, its counter-attack would not be able to start before late afternoon. Meanwhile, the Soviet divisions exploited the opening, fortifying Kuuterselkä against any Finnish attempts to retake the village and rushing towards the rear of Melander's Cavalry Brigade.

Thirty heavy tanks brushed aside the few defenders, advancing towards Sykiälä. At Vammeljärvi village they came close to capturing the surprised Cavalry Brigade's headquarters. In the nick of time, Melander managed to lead his men through the forests in the direction of Uusikirkko. The troops in the brigade were now separated from their commanders. The men were left to retreat the best way they could to the Vammeljoki River line. In the process the brigade lost all its communications equipment and heavy weapons. At Vammeljoki, these somewhat disorganised troops were reinforced with elements of the regrouped 10th Division. The rest of Sihvo's 10th Division dug in on the isthmus between lakes Rieskjärvi and Vammeljärvi.

During the following night, the unstoppable Soviet onslaught continued past the defences at Vammeljoki, prompting the spiking of the remaining heavy artillery. The Finnish counter-measures on the night of 15 June, in the direction of Kuuterselkä, were launched too late and with insufficient force. It transpired that, with the support of the Assault Gun Battalion, Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade managed to get within 300m of the VT Line at Kuuterselkä. On the north side of the village they even took hold of a short section of the old defensive lines. There the Finnish counter-attack was met with such concentrated firepower that they were unable to advance any further. The Jäger proceeded to destroy numerous enemy tanks and many artillery pieces but simply did not have the men to recapture the

village. By the morning of 15 June, 1st Jäger Brigade had to be granted permission to retreat for a period of rest in the army's reserves. Recapturing the VT Line was an impossible task for these light formations. The only silver lining was that by now the pressure on Martola's 2nd Division near Siiranmäki was slowly receding as the Soviets diverted their focus into exploiting the breakthrough at Kuuterselkä.

The rout of the Cavalry Brigade and the presence of strong Soviet formations at Lake Vammeljärvi meant that the south-western end of the VT Line was permanently lost. This indicated that IV Army Corps would not be able to muster sufficient forces to stop the Soviets, even at the next set of lake narrows as had originally been planned. The strike force that Mannerheim had been assembling to the rear, to be used for this major counter-attack, had to be quickly redirected into bolstering the collapsing right flank of Laatikainen's IV Army Corps. To this effect, Colonel Pietari Autti's 4th Division received orders to relocate to Lake Kaukjärvi, while Lieutenant-Colonel Lauri Haanterä's 3rd Brigade was to travel to Lake Kanneljärvi. Elements of both units arrived at the front well before the main body of troops.

Mannerheim realised that he could no longer control all these forces from his distant headquarters at Mikkeli. Instead he needed somebody making immediate decisions on the ground. Accordingly, Lieutenant-General Karl Oesch was given the leadership of all the Finnish forces on the Karelian Isthmus, as Commander

(1900–1981)

MICHAEL BUSAROV

MAJOR-GENERAL

97TH RIFLE CORPS

Michael Mihailovich Busarov volunteered to join the Red Army in 1918, taking part in the Civil War as a squad leader. During the 1920s and 1930s Busarov continued his military studies mainly by distance learning by post, and served in the leadership of different border guard units.

In 1942 Busarov took a post as Chief of Operations for the Thirtieth Army. In November the same year he became the commander of the 158th Rifle Division. Busarov was promoted major-general in 1943 and soon after transferred to work as chief of staff for the Third Strike Army. He was appointed to lead the 97th Rifle Corps upon his graduation from the Soviet Union's highest military academy. Busarov's corps captured Viipuri, for which he was awarded the Order of Suvorov 2nd Class. Busarov retired from active service due to his age in 1955.

(1892–1973)

JUSSI SIHVO

COLONEL

10TH DIVISION

Jäger Johannes 'Jussi' Sihvo took part in the Civil War as a squad leader, and subsequently volunteered for the expeditions to Aunus and North Ingria.

He first led the 4th Brigade and then Task Force Sihvo during the Winter War. Sihvo took over the 10th Division during the Continuation War. He was promoted to major-general in 1942.

When the Red Army began its onslaught in 1944, Sihvo's division faced the concentrated Soviet might at Valkeasaari. This resulted in the main defensive line being breached all too quickly. The following day his division was pulled to the rear for reorganisation, and Sihvo was reassigned for special missions by Mannerheim. Subsequently he was assigned to the committee for planning fortifications. Sihvo was finally put on half-pay by the end of 1944, and he chose to resign a year later.

On 17 June Colonel Kai Savonjousi became the first officer trained solely in Finland (not a Jäger or ex-Tsarist) to be granted command of a whole division. Here he is shown anxiously studying a map of the front line. Savonjousi had given the following speech about the large number of deserters in his new 10th Division: 'We are not going to retreat any further from here, because we simply cannot. The next line of defence consists of our mothers, children, parents and the whole open heart of Finland. Here we die, I have come to this spot to give my life. Brothers! We have run what we have run. Now it is again time to become a Finnish man defending his country!' (Sa-Kuva)

of the Isthmus Forces. Upon his arrival at IV Army Corps headquarters, on 15 June, Oesch received Mannerheim's grim orders: he must now lead the forces in an orderly withdrawal to the VKT Line, running from Viipuri to Kurparsaari and from there to Taipale. Furthermore, he was to make the Soviets pay heavily for each step they took into Finland by committing the men in determined delaying actions.

Meanwhile, at Siiranmäki, Martola's 2nd Division went on to repel the combined efforts of the Soviet infantry, armour, artillery and ground-attack planes for a total of four days. When the attack started on the evening of 12 June, the Finns had a total of 13 battalions spread across a 20km sector, although two of those were of secondary quality and seven were already suffering battle fatigue. Lieutenant-General George Anisimov's 98th Rifle Corps began its attack with a spearhead formed by the 281st and 381st Rifle divisions, but already after two days the 177th Rifle Division was needed in order to replace all the fallen men. Martola had deployed his artillery brilliantly, which had especially helped the 7th Infantry Regiment facing the brunt of the Soviet blows. Their valiant counter-attacks pushed back the enemy time after time. The 2nd Division's war diary from the time states:

> At 20:50 our own strong artillery bombardment began, and Lieutenant-Colonel Varko [2nd Battalion, 49th Infantry Regiment] managed to get his counter-attack moving. By 22:30 the enemy only held a 50m stretch of our trenches. The recaptured terrain and dugouts were strewn with enemy corpses. During the counter-attack and over the following night, seven [KV] and three T-34 tanks were destroyed. By 23:00 the breach had finally been closed, but then the enemy's renewed attack opened another gap in between the ruins of Seppälä's house and the Vehmainen road. At the time, four heavy enemy tanks were still among our positions firing continuously. Lieutenant-Colonel Varko attacked again at 23:20 and at 00:30 supported by our artillery. By 05:30 the last [KV tank] in our positions was destroyed. At the same time we captured two anti-tank guns and five heavy machine guns. Half an hour later, two new [KV tanks] arrived at the breach. We were again in control of the trenches everywhere except for the short section by Seppälä's house. (Topi, 1954)

In this battle a total of 21 Soviet heavy tanks were destroyed. When the enemy started to withdraw on the night of 16 June, the Finns were still holding Siiranmäki. The defensive victory cost the Finns 164 dead, 760 wounded and around 50 missing in action, while the Soviet dead or seriously wounded numbered nearly 5,000. On the eastern end of the isthmus, III Army Corps managed to withdraw to the VT Line in an orderly manner.

THE VIIPURI–KUPARSAARI–TAIPALE (VKT) LINE

On 15 June, Mannerheim and Oesch discussed the possibility of using what remained of the old Mannerheim Line from the Winter War as the next set of defences. After consideration, Oesch was forced to admit that there would not be enough time to assemble the men and to prepare the defences there. Instead, he proposed that the troops would perform a tenacious fighting withdrawal all the way back to the VKT Line.

The VKT Line was the third and last of the Finnish defensive positions on the Karelian Isthmus. The fortification of these positions had belatedly started in early 1944. Now that the front line and the VT Line had suddenly collapsed, the Finns had no choice but to retreat all the way to these mostly unprepared positions. Thankfully, in many places along the VKT Line the defences were bolstered by some formidable natural features. In the west these included several smaller lakes and swamps and on the eastern side the wide Vuoksi River. In this section the VKT Line was sited on the foundations of the Rear Line used in the Winter War. These positions had been completely destroyed by Soviet demolition teams during the previous year of peace.

Corporal Lauri Leppänen of assault gun Ps 531-5 (‘Amalia’) awaiting orders at Hanhijoki on 23 June 1944. This tank belonged to the 1st Company of the Assault Gun Battalion and took part in the counter-attack at Kuuterselkä and in the battles in the Leitimojärvi–Portinhoikka sector as well as along the road to Talinmylly. Amalia destroyed at least one enemy T-34/85 tank before perishing whilst engaging multiple *Sotka* in a strike against the Red Army bridgehead on 11 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Arriving at the VKT Line, 18–21 June

When the order was given to retreat from the VT Line on 15 June, it was reasoned that the Soviet forces would by now be considerably depleted. The hope was that this weakening would make a critical difference by the time they reached the VKT Line. The Finns also expected that there would still be sufficient time to transfer reserves in from Ladoga Karelia. Moving these men would leave the Maaselkä and Aunus fronts dangerously depleted, but at least from these locations it would take the Red Army much longer to march to the heart of Finland. By now, Mannerheim had concentrated nearly 60 per cent of all of his forces in this last effort to halt the enemy.

The defences of the VKT Line were split into three main sectors. Siilasvuo's III Army Corps held the Taipale sector up to Kuparsaari. The newly arrived V Army Corps led by Major-General Antero Svensson would take control of the westernmost sector by Viipuri Bay. Laatikainen's IV Army Corps would continue to hold the centre of the line from Kuparsaari westwards. However, first these men had to disengage and retreat safely to the VKT Line.

On 16 June, the threat to the right flank of III Army Corps finally forced Siilasvuo's men to retreat behind the waters of the Vuoksi and Suvanto. The centre and right flank of IV Army Corps had successfully pulled out and dug in on the line running between lakes Muurila–Kuolemanjärvi–Kaukjärvi–Muolaanjärvi. The corps' left flank was still in the process

(1893–1949)

ARMAS KEMPPI

COLONEL
20TH BRIGADE

After the Finnish Civil War, Armas Artturi Kemppi served as a company commander until being assigned a battalion in 1935. He was promoted to lieutenant-colonel the same year.

Throughout the Winter War, Kemppi led the 30th Infantry Regiment of 10th Division. In January 1940, the division was renamed the 7th and Kemppi's regiment the 21st. During the Interim Peace, he was transferred to lead the 7th Brigade. When the Continuation War began, Kemppi commanded the 7th Regiment at the battles in the eastern Karelian Isthmus. In 1943, he transferred to Home Front Headquarters as an inspector of training. He was soon to return to the front to lead the 22nd Infantry Regiment at Syväri. In 1944, Colonel Kemppi took over the 20th Brigade in the Viipuri area. The fall of Viipuri almost without a fight resulted in Kemppi being removed from front-line command.

He resigned after the war, and worked as a tax inspector until his death in 1949.

(1897–1974)

GEORGE ANISIMOV

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
98TH RIFLE CORPS

In 1916 George Ivanovich Anisimov graduated from Irgutsk Military School in Siberia. Lieutenant Anisimov had time to act as company commander for the Tsar's armies and then changed sides to fight with the opposing Red Army. During the Civil War, he rose to command a battalion on the western front.

Following Stalin's purges of 1937, Anisimov was forced to resign from service. However, by the beginning of the Great Patriotic War Anisimov had been accepted back to the colours. By 1942 he was able to again lead front-line divisions and army corps. He was promoted to major-general in January 1943 and made the commander of the 123rd Rifle Corps of the Leningrad Front. Shortly afterwards, Anisimov was promoted to lieutenant-general and took over the 6th Rifle Corps. He was appointed as commander of the 98th Rifle Corps on 11 May 1944 and took part in the major offensive on the Karelian Isthmus. Anisimov retired in 1963.

The Finnish Vickers tank R-658 at the junction of the Mannerheim and Torkkeli roads in Viipuri on 23 June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

of completing its withdrawal to the defendable narrow strips of land separated by the Muolaanjärvi, Yskjärvi and Kirkkojärvi lakes. While this manoeuvre was being completed, Martola's Cavalry Brigade had been left responsible for the delaying rearguard action in the coastal sector. On their east side the area between Hatjalahti Bay and Lake Kaukjärvi was now held by the 10th Division. From lakes Kaukjärvi to Muolaanjärvi, Autti's 4th Division kept the Soviets at bay. Their left flank was protected by Pajari's 3rd Division. Finally, the last holding force comprised Lagus' Armoured Division near Lake Perkjärvi. These men were to withstand the brunt of the next Soviet attack.

On the night of 16 June, with its very last ounce of strength, the 2nd Jäger Battalion from Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade recaptured Perkjärvi village from the Soviets. This badly mauled unit had to be promptly relieved by Autti's 4th Division. Captain Lauri Jäntti recorded that, 'After the 2nd Jäger Battalion's clash at Perkjärvi, only the quartermaster and commander's

adjutant remained of all of their officers ... and he was also wounded … No officer replacements had yet arrived. In less than a week the battalion had lost 90 per cent of its officers'. (Jäntti, 1956) Nevertheless, these men displayed *sisu* (indomitable spirit, or resilience) and held their ground, while the two formations closest to the coast again floundered. The breakthrough that the Soviets succeeded in producing in the 10th Division and Cavalry Brigade sectors was calamitous. Soon the enemy tanks were able to swing behind the defenders, spreading through the opening towards the centre of the Finnish lines. This forced all the troops in the area to retreat again. Oesch had planned to give orders for the army to turn back and fight on the Humallahti–Summa–Muolaanjärvi line. As it happened, nothing came of his plans as the Cavalry Brigade in such a shambles that it continued to flee all the way to the Rokkalanjoki River.

This retreat forced the Armoured Division to double back for a counter-attack from its promised period of rest at the rear. From 18 June onwards, Lagus assumed overall command of the 10th Division and the Cavalry Brigade, and with this combined force of questionable elements set down to defend the Rokkalanjoki area from two advancing Soviet divisions. Lagus' Jäger held these positions only for a day until a new breach west of Lake Muolaanjärvi dictated another withdrawal.

On 18 June, Govorov received promotion to the rank of Marshal of the Soviet Union. His next goal was to destroy the elements of the Finnish IV and III Army corps in front of the VKT Line, and to capture Viipuri. This city was important to both the Soviets and the Finns as a regional administrative centre and crossroads where troops could be best assembled and supplied. Stavka gave Govorov a deadline of 20 June 1944 to take Viipuri. For this task, Gusev's Twenty-First Army, now including its reserve formations, marched with nearly 18 divisions, four armoured brigades, eight tank and assault-gun regiments, as well as over 100 field artillery batteries. These troops were further supported by approximately 800 planes. On their right flank Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army was to cross over the Vuoksi River without stopping to prepare. Once the bridgehead had been formed, the troops were to continue the attack towards the town of Sortavala in the north-east.

On 19 June 1944, Mannerheim gave the following set of daily orders to the soldiers on the Karelian Isthmus:

> When our army settles in to defend the so-called VKT Line, it is time to put a stop to the enemy's invasion. To achieve this, I demand that along the line we will engage in stark defensive combat. I want especially to draw attention

> to the fact that, should this line fall, it will considerably decrease our options for continued resistance, and jeopardise our whole country and population. I am well aware that the fortification works on this line are non-existent or have barely begun. However, I have faith that a Finnish soldier, when it is demanded of him, will use the terrain and his own *sisu* in creating an unshakeable defence. (Raunio and Kilin, 2013)

Later that same day, the Cavalry Brigade under Colonel Urho Tähtinen (who replaced Melander on 17 June) was reassigned to fend off enemy landings from the western coast of Viipuri. The remainder of IV Army Corps was ordered to take up strong defensive positions along the VKT Line by the morning of 20 June at the latest. How strong the defences could be would remain to be seen, as this safe haven still lacked sufficient dugouts and firing positions. Over the previous two weeks, the men sent to prepare the fortifications had worked day and night, but there simply had not been enough time to erect the kinds of defences needed. Laatikainen delegated the defence of Viipuri city to Colonel Armas Kemppi's 20th Brigade. To the north-east of Viipuri was stationed Haanterä's 3rd Brigade, as well as Paalu's 18th, Autti's 4th and Pajari's 3rd divisions. Lagus' Armoured Division and 10th Division (now under Colonel Kai Savonjousi) formed the reserves.

THE FALL OF VIIPURI

So far, the Red Army had been relentlessly snapping at the heels of the retreating Finns. This extract from the official war diary of Colonel Eero Juva's 58th Infantry Regiment (10th Division) recounts the fighting withdrawal:

> At Yläsommee our regiment had to again receive enemy attacks from both right along the road and from left from the direction of Myllymäki. The 1st Battalion guarded the road and the 3rd Battalion defended on the left. During the night, under cover of the fog and darkness, the enemy tried to repeatedly breach our positions, but a counter-attack from the 2nd Battalion drove them back … At 02:30 we started to retreat … in danger of being flanked from both left and right. Once the Soviet tanks had reached the edges of the city, our regiment had to retreat through bogs and woods breaking through the Soviet encirclement into Viipuri. Early in the morning of the 20 June our regiment marched past the capital of Karelia. The heavy withdrawal stage was now over for the regiment, it had taken us 11 long and bitter days.

After Viipuri fell, men from Lieutenant-Colonel Alpo Marttinen's 17th Division had to dig new defensive positions in the Tienhaara area. Here a sub-machine gunner sits in the mud, waiting for the Soviet preparatory bombardment to cease and for the inevitable infantry assault to begin, on 25 June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

In places, battle was joined immediately upon both forces arriving at the VKT Line. The first Soviet priority, however, was the prize of Viipuri. Govorov's plan was that after the capture of the city, his forces were to continue directly to the crossroads on the north side of the city. From there they were to advance to the Lappeenranta–Imatra sector by 28 June. Crossing the Kymijoki River, the Red Army was to march onwards, reaching the capital city of Helsinki by mid-July. Based on their estimations of how the war was progressing here and on the southern front against the Germans, Stavka chose not to send any more fresh troops to this front. It was thought there were still plenty of men left to fulfil the original objective and crush Finland's puny forces.

In Viipuri Bay, the foremost Finnish outposts were on the Koivisto Islands. In order to win more time for the organisation of Viipuri's resistance, the 2nd Coastal Artillery Regiment was to hold their ground on these islands until 23 June. The whole future of the Finnish nation was now on a knife-edge. The fate of the country would be decided by the forthcoming decisive battles. The eastern Karelian Front was further stripped of the 6th and 11th divisions, which Mannerheim transferred over to the reserves under his personal command.

In order to replenish the dwindling ranks of the army, some of the older age groups that had earlier been discharged were now remobilised. At first, service was resumed for those born in 1905–06. Then on 9 July, desperate times forced those born during the year 1903 to rejoin the war. These counter-measures should have been initiated months earlier. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

On 20 June, Soviet forces captured Viipuri in only one day. There were no prepared defences before the city, and Kemppi's newly arrived 20th Brigade was still in the process of taking up positions when the Soviet hammer blow struck. Two decisive factors helped the Soviets overwhelm the defences so quickly. Firstly, there were simply not enough artillery pieces, nor sufficient ammunition for those few guns present. Secondly, the Red Army immediately followed in the wake of the battle-drained

rearguard. Seeing this, Major Bäckman's battalion from the 20th Brigade was utterly shaken, and panicked men began to desert their positions. The enemy quickly exploited any gaps this left in the Finnish lines, thus penetrating deep into the city. Now the Soviets were able to fold back the rest of the defensive lines and the remainder of the 20th Brigade was forced to retreat.

The Finnish flag on the tower of Viipuri Castle was finally lowered at 16:45. Afterwards, Kemppi was incarcerated for 25 days for neglect of duty. The same court sentenced Bäckman to eight months of hard labour; he chose to take his own life in March 1945. Elsewhere the Finnish lines still held, but the Soviets once again possessed this ancient Finnish city. By the evening, Laatikainen, Oesch and Mannerheim had to conclude that recapturing Viipuri would be impossible.

The fall of Viipuri triggered the Finns into approaching their contacts in Stockholm in order to see if the Soviets were ready to negotiate peace. The answer they received was that the Soviet Union would only accept Finland's complete and unconditional surrender. This was not an option for the Finns; the war had to continue.

Holding the VKT Line from the onset had been especially difficult and yet critical. While the final Finnish reserves were making full speed to the area, the initial onslaught had to be withstood by worn-down and battle-weary men. Against IV Army Corps, the Soviets were able to rotate in fresh troops from a total of five entire corps. This included a total of 17 divisions and numerous mechanised forces. Nevertheless, their sharpest edge had already been blunted by the relentless delaying battles and difficulties of supply. The 30th Guards Rifle Corps had to be rested, while the attack was taken up by the 97th, 110th, 109th and 108th Rifle corps around Viipuri, and by the 6th and 98th in the direction of Heinjoki.

Furthermore, north of Viipuri the terrain finally started to favour the defenders. The smaller lakes formed easily held narrows and the rocky terrain was less suited to the frontal attacks of the tank columns. More importantly, the defenders were becoming galvanised by the realisation that this was their last stand. They were the only thing that stood between the Soviet invaders and their unguarded homes and families. Ten days after the loss of Viipuri, all the Finnish reserve troops that were ever going to arrive in the area had done so. This transfer of troops had greatly evened the odds, and now both artillery and men could be concentrated on the areas where the Soviets would next focus their attacks.

CHAPTER 10
THE TALI-IHANTALA BATTLES

Following the fall of Viipuri, the Soviet forces were in a hurry to bring about Finland's unconditional surrender. The battle for the critical Tali and Ihantala sectors was to be largest the north had ever seen. Soon 200,000 soldiers would be involved in the fighting, condensed into a battleground 12km wide and 15km deep. If the Red Army could get past these last choke points, and cross the old Moscow Treaty borders, both Stalin's political and military goals would soon be fulfilled. From there, the Soviets would be free to strike deep into the undefended Finnish heartland. Only the rumoured Salpa Line much further inland could still slow them down. Politically it seemed plausible to break the Finnish government's will to fight, or at least force another quick peace treaty. From Stavka's viewpoint this could not happen soon enough, as all available forces were needed to win the race to Berlin.

Sturmgeschütz assault guns and infantry performing a joint counter-strike. An extract from the daily order of Major-General Lagus, the commander of the Armoured Division, issued on 3 July 1944, reads: 'Soldiers! At this moment bets are being placed on Finland's destiny. Either our people will be literally swept from the surface of the Earth, as our enemy has promised to do to us, or we will fight with persistent *sisu*, securing our nation's future. All of Finland is now confidently watching the army and each individual soldier, and believes in the success of our struggle. In his radio address, Prime Minister Linkomies encouraged the nation to combine all our strengths to reach the common goal. Accordingly, each of our soldiers must remember their duty during this battle. The Armoured Division in particular must continue to follow the honorable traditions it has built, and thus serve as a shining example to the rest of our fighting units.' (Sa-Kuva)

Finnish pioneers laying down German-made model 1935 anti-tank mines in the Ihantala area on 30 June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Lieutenant-General Michael Tikhonov's 108th Rifle Corps was to continue clearing the archipelago north-west of Viipuri. Meanwhile, having first reached the road network on the other side of Viipuri Bay west from Juustila, Major-General Michael Busarov's 97th Rifle Corps was to battle Haanterä's 3rd Brigade for control of the shores of Suomenvedenpohja. A series of fierce battles erupted on each of IV Army Corps' frontal sectors while putting great strain on V Army Corps' flank. From the Soviet point of view, these were just probing attacks aimed at gauging the Finnish positions and denying the defenders any rest or time to prepare. The attempts by Tikhonov's and Busarov's corps to capture the outlying islands west of Viipuri forced the deployment of Major-General Victor Sundman's 17th Division as well as Heiskanen's 11th Division onto this front (11th Division was still en route and would arrive to take frontal responsibility on 27 June). Sundman and Heiskanen would prove essential in repelling the Soviet attacks in this sector. However, the loss of these two reserve formations was to be keenly felt at the IV Army Corps front, where the Soviets were to focus their next efforts.

To the east, the main strike of Gusev's Twenty-First Army was aimed at the railroad crossing at Tali–Repola. The first wave of the attack was led by Alfyorov's 109th Rifle Corps. Once his men achieved a breakthrough on the Tammisuo–Mannikkala defensive line, Simonyak's elite 30th Guards Rifle Corps was to proceed directly to the objective. Meanwhile,

A Finnish anti-tank squad, armed with new Panzerfausts, prepares to receive the enemy at Ihantala on 30 June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

on their right flank, Major-General Afanasi Gryaznov's 110th Rifle Corps struck north on the east side of Lake Repolanjärvi. Against these two corps, the Finns could only initially pit Paalu's 18th Division and Autti's 4th Division. Meanwhile, Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army would continue to hammer away, and tie down the Finns along the length of the VKT line. Once Gusev's Twenty-First Army had achieved the breach and was advancing westwards towards Helsinki, Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army would swing north and east crashing into the rear of the rest of the Finnish defenders in Ladoga Karelia. As a second wave of the invasion, Korovinkov's Fifty-Ninth Army was to simultaneously attack towards Lappeenranta.

On 21 June, Alfyorov's 109th Rifle Corps made its first attempt at creating a decisive breach in the VKT Line, against Paalu's 18th Division at Mannikkala, while simultaneous attacks from Tikhonov's 108th Rifle Corps also hit Haanterä's 3rd Brigade on the strip of land separated by Lake Kärstilänjärvi and Suomenvedenpohja Bay. To the embarrassment of Stavka, which had insisted on relentless assault and advance, the Finnish lines held. As Mannerheim's advisors had rightly calculated, this was the only area where the terrain allowed the massed numbers of Soviet tanks to be effectively employed and thus would be the point at which the strongest assault would be aimed. The following morning, after a heavy, six-hour bombardment, the 109th Rifle Corps finally overcame Colonel Väinö Forsberg's 48th Infantry Regiment (18th Division) and secured the Mannikkala area. From there the Red Army's tanks continued straight towards Tali station and threatened Portinhoikka, Ihantala and Kavantsaari.

To the west, the 3rd Brigade was forced to retreat towards the Saimaa Canal, holding a line from Härkävuori to Kärstilänjärvi throughout the following day and night. Under incredible pressure, the Finns would resolutely defend this bottleneck.

(1913–1993)

KURT KUHLMEY

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL
DETACHMENT KUHLMEY

Kurt Kuhlmey headed his namesake detachment in providing critical support to the Finns during the Tali–Ihantala fighting. He had started his flying career as a glider pilot and then joined the Luftwaffe in April 1934. By the beginning of World War II, Kuhlmey had reached the rank of senior lieutenant. He served on many of Germany's fronts including Poland, Norway, the Battle for Britain, the Crimea, Malta and Crete.

In June 1944, Lieutenant-Colonel Kuhlmey and his Stuka dive-bombers were sent to Finland to help stem the Red tide. After a highly successful mission, the detachment was recalled to Germany in July. Kuhlmey continued to fight there until the end of the war. After the war, Kuhlmey served in the West German Air Force. By the time he retired in 1959, he had reached the rank of major-general.

(1901–1956)

NICHOLAS SIMONYAK

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
30TH GUARDS RIFLE CORPS

Nicholas Pavlovich Simonyak's military career began as an ensign in the Tsar's ranks in 1916. He was the chief inspector for the Leningrad Military Council during the Winter War. Simonyak was promoted to the rank of colonel on 21 March 1940. When the Great Patriotic War started, he led the 8th Independent Brigade garrisoning the Hanko naval base in Finland. Whilst besieged, Simonyak received his promotion to the rank of major-general. After the evacuation from Hanko, he led the 136th Rifle Division and later the 63rd Guards Rifle Division. On 18 April 1943, Simonyak was made commander of the 30th Guards Rifle Corps. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general on 22 February 1944.

Simonyak's men fought valiantly in the Soviet spearhead during the initial breach of the front line and the Tali–Ihantala battles. There, they maintained the Soviet bridgehead and narrowly avoided being surrounded themselves. After the fighting died down, Simonyak commanded both the Third Strike Army and the Sixty-Seventh Army for a short time. He retired for health reasons in 1948.

Gusev's Twenty-First Army strengthened its position over the next couple of days. On 24 June, Leningrad Front ordered the 22,600-man 30th Guards Rifle Corps, which had been sent to the rear for a period of rest ten days earlier, to again take position at the head of the attack. However, the Soviets were unable to increase the breach in IV Army Corps' front. Meanwhile, the Finns considered this to have been a victory of sorts, as they had gained sufficient breathing space for their own reinforcements to arrive, including the 6th, 11th and 17th divisions as well as (on 30 June) the German 303rd Assault Gun Brigade. By 25 June, 14 of Finland's 22 available military formations were already deployed in the area, with a further one still on its way. Simply put, this was where Finland's destiny would be decided; there would be no other battle after this one. It was clear that the tenacity of the Finnish defence had taken Govorov's headquarters by surprise. He started to plan and prepare the second and final attack. For both sides, there was nowhere else left to turn.

On 22 June, Svensson's V Army Corps had received orders to take control of the areas west of the Saimaa Canal. His command now included Tähtinen's Cavalry Brigade on the western shores of Viipuri Bay with Savonjousi's 10th Division in reserve right behind it, as well as Sundman's newly arrived 17th Division from Aunus, which took up position on the

DETACHMENT KUHLMEY
(*GEFECHTSVERBAND KUHLMEY*)

Named after its commander Lieutenant-Colonel Kurt Kuhlmey, Detachment Kuhlmey fought in Finland as part of the military aid received from Germany. This Luftwaffe contingent comprised a mix of fighters and attack planes:

- 33 Junkers Ju-87 D-5 Stuka dive-bombers
- 62 Focke-Wulf 190 A-6 fighters
- 16 Focke-Wulf 190 F-3 and F-8 fighter-bombers
- 8 Messerschmitt 109 G-8 reconnaissance planes

In addition, the contingent was supported by 35 Savoia-Marchetti S.M. 81 transport aircraft and assorted liaison, transport and reconnaissance planes. The first elements of Detachment Kuhlmey arrived in Finland on 16 June and started operations almost immediately from Immola airfield. By 20 June, Kuhlmey's FW-190 fighters had reportedly downed over 70 enemy planes. Finnish airmen valued their German colleagues greatly, especially due to their vigorous contributions and active military spirit. Detachment Kuhlmey's actions exuded a true concern for the Finnish cause, and spoke of their unselfish willingness to struggle with their brothers-in-arms against a common enemy. Even though the Finnish Air Force had several modern Messerschmitt 109 G-2 fighters, the bulk of its equipment consisted of outdated models that had limited combat capabilities. Furthermore, the planes were always too few to resist the vast numbers of the Soviet Air Forces. Detachment Kuhlmey's support was invaluable under these circumstances, and it can be said to have played a key part in stopping the Soviet onslaught. In practice, the Germans' arrival doubled the amount of available fighters and increased the amount of attack planes by 50 per cent.* Detachment Kuhlmey's Stukas clocked up to five times the number of flight hours compared to Finnish Air Force planes, so in reality the significance of their presence was even greater.

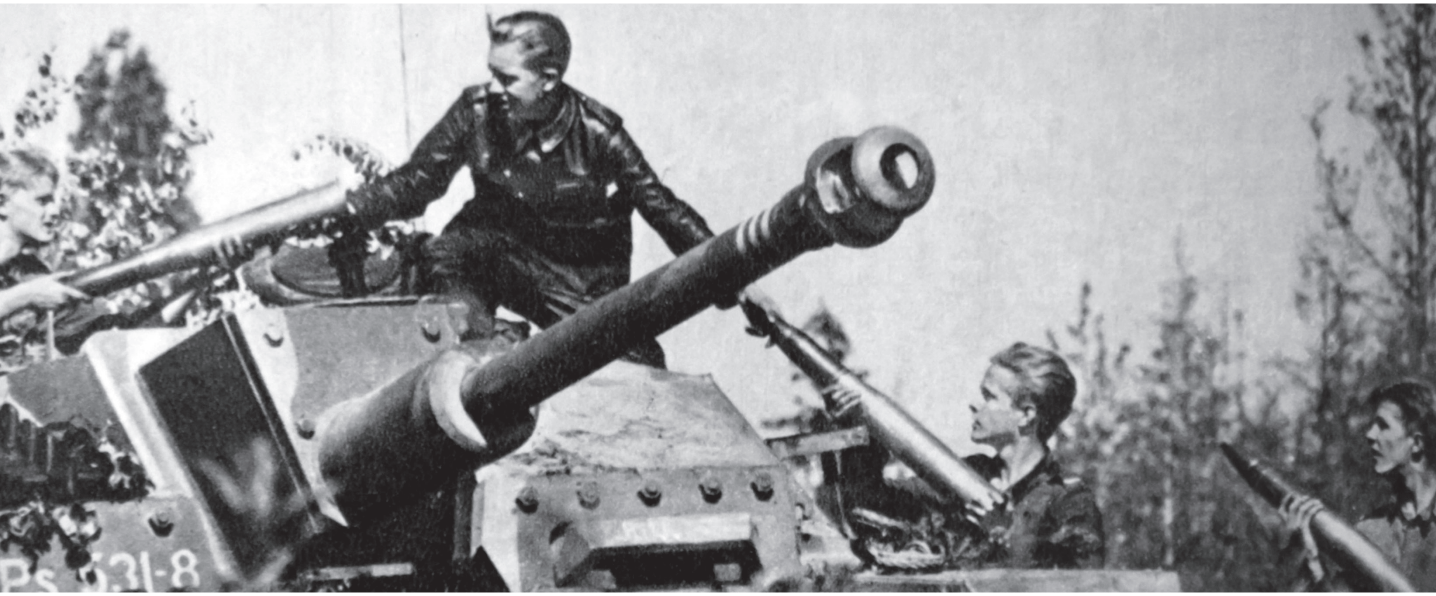
The main body of Detachment Kuhlmey left Finland on 23 July after the front had stabilised. The last fighter-bombers departed on 5 August.

* Back up pilots meant that there could be many more missions

hotly contested coastline of Suomenvedenpohja. At this stage Kemppi's 20th Brigade was in the rear recovering from the humiliating surrender of Viipuri.

Laatikainen's IV Army Corps remained at the most vulnerable part of the line. On his right flank Haanterä's 3rd Brigade resolutely held at bay the Soviet 97th Rifle Corps, while Paalu's 18th Division and Autti's 4th Division tried desperately to contain most of Twenty-First Army to the Tali narrows. The left flank of the corps in the Vuoksi sector was defended by Pajari's 3rd Division. Due to the heavy fighting around Ihantala, Lagus' Armoured Division, together with Heiskanen's 11th Division, first relieved the 18th Division from the front and then carried out repeated counter-attacks against the Soviet spearhead. The eastern isthmus remained in the hands of Siilasvuo's III Army Corps, Vuosalmi was defended by Martola's 2nd Division and the Suvanto area by Hersalo's 15th Division, with Taipale controlled by Maskula's 19th Brigade.

On 22 June Finland was to receive some unexpected help following a surprise visit by Foreign Minister Ribbentrop. After the Ryti–Ribbentrop Agreement had been sealed, with President Ryti giving his personal guarantee that Finland would not seek a separate peace to leave the war early, more



Sturmgeschütz Ps 531-8 'Aili' from the 2nd Company of the Assault Gun Battalion receiving ammunition at Pihkalanjärvi on 2 July 1944. This tank, under the command of Lieutenant Arvid Pettones, destroyed at least five enemy tanks during the battles of Kuuterselkä, Perkjärvi and Portinhoikka. (Sa-Kuva)

aid from Germany was hastily dispatched. This support was to arrive just in the nick of time, and once the great battle had already been joined. This assistance included the 122nd Infantry Division and the 303rd Assault Gun Brigade. Of even greater help was Detachment Kuhlmey, which had already been dispatched to Finland in mid-June. In addition, ammunition and vital anti-tank weapons now arrived aplenty. Another shipment of 70,000kg of grain was also promised without delay.

THE GREAT BATTLE BEGINS

The greatest battle the north of Europe had ever witnessed started with Leningrad Front's second breakthrough attempt on 25 June. In the IV Army Corps sector, 16 rested and replenished Soviet divisions began a two-week continuous battle in the Tali–Ihantala area. Following a magnificent artillery bombardment, and protected by thick smoke screens, wave after wave of Soviet troops rolled forward.[6] The Finnish front line was able to hold for only a short time. At the outset, Busarov's 97th Rifle Corps managed to breach the lines at Tammisuo. Although its 178th Rifle Division (under Major-General Alexander Kronik) attacking along the western shore of Lake Kärstilänjärvi was stopped early on, the 314th Rifle Division (led by Colonel Michael Yelsinov) managed to force Haanterä's 3rd Brigade to withdraw to Lavola at the southern end of the Saimaa Canal. However, the most dangerous situation for the Finns arose from the breakthrough at Portinhoikka crossroads. There

6 The attack was supported by over 40 artillery batteries, which roughly translated into over 230 barrels aimed at each kilometre of the defences.

Simonyak's five-division 30th Guards Rifle Corps, relying on a plethora of tanks and exploiting their mobility, attacked along both sides of Lake Leitimojärvi. Simonyak also employed amphibious tanks, attempting to cut the corner of the lake and surprise the defenders south of Portinhoikka.

The 268th Rifle Division (under Colonel Nicholas Sokolov until killed by shellfire on 27 June, thereafter led by Colonel Philip Voytulevits) attacked towards Ihantala on the eastern shores, and penetrated well past the lake to Nurmilampi. In the west, by nightfall, the tip of the spear had already penetrated past the Portinhoikka crossroads. There the armoured spearhead had immediately divided, with Major-General Ivan Romantsev's 64th Guards Rifle Division proceeding towards Ihantala and Major-General Saveli Putkov's 45th Guards Rifle Division taking minor roads towards Juustila. In this lightning-fast attack, the 30th Guards Rifle Corps nearly caught Paalu's 18th Division between its pincers. This resulted in the unit's strength dropping below 40 per cent and consequent removal from the front, while its artillery, pioneers and signalling troops were to continue to aid the replacement 11th Division. (Major-General Gustaf 'Gösta' Snellman, would replaced Paalu on 29 June.) The most urgent threats to the Finns were the armoured columns that were now heading towards Ihantala and the vanguard, which had already reached Soppi. When all seemed lost, the commander of the 6th Regiment (18th Division), Lieutenant-Colonel Reino Inkinen, gathered groups of pioneer tank-destroyer teams and the

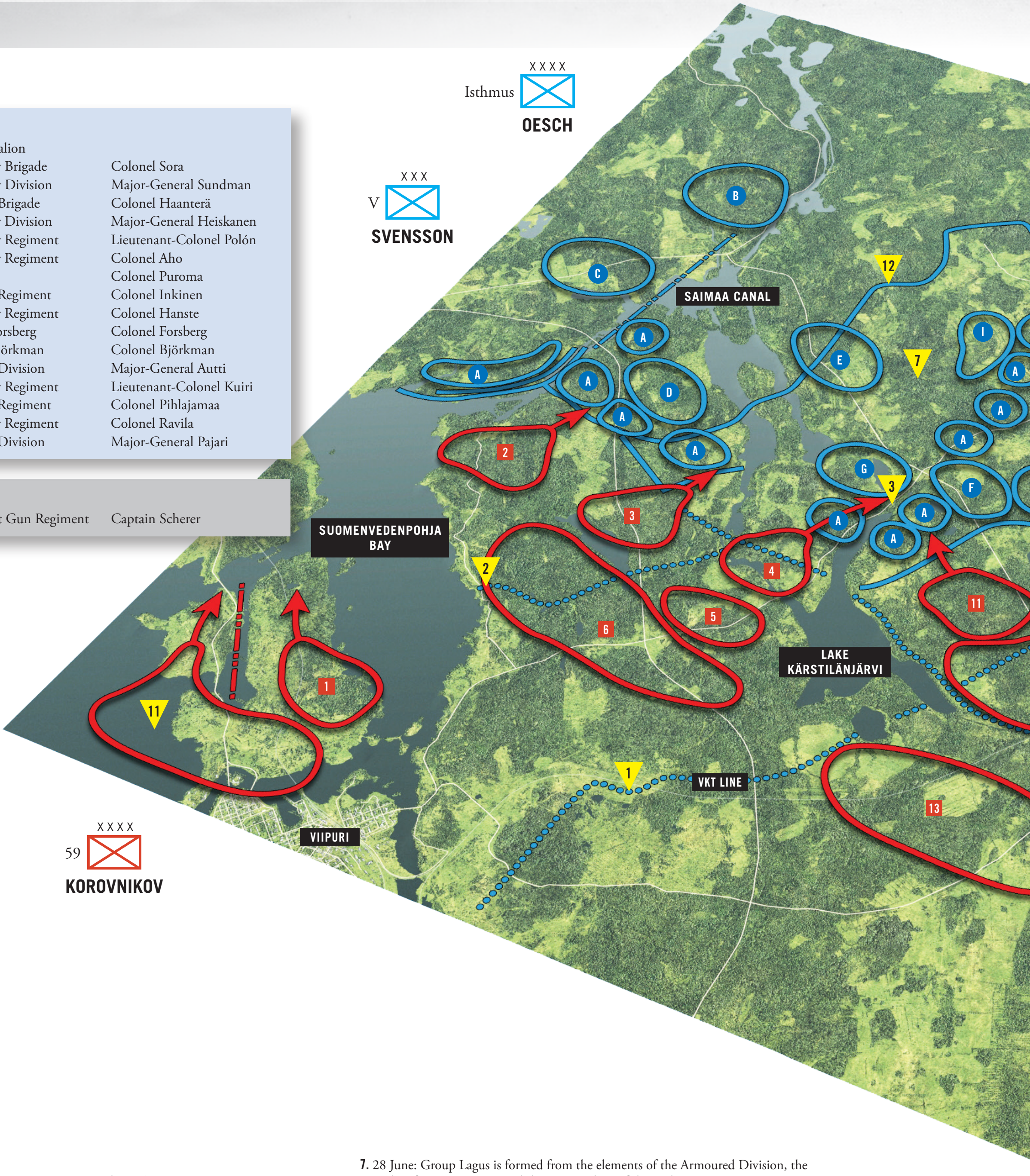
Finnish pioneers maintain lines of communication by drawing telephone cable under fire. *(Ratkaisu 1944*, Wolf H. Halsti)

FINNISH FORCES

A	Infantry Battalion	
B	20th Infantry Brigade	Colonel Sora
C	17th Infantry Division	Major-General Sundman
D	3rd Infantry Brigade	Colonel Haanterä
E	11th Infantry Division	Major-General Heiskanen
F	30th Infantry Regiment	Lieutenant-Colonel Polón
G	50th Infantry Regiment	Colonel Aho
H	Jäger Brigade	Colonel Puroma
I	6th Infantry Regiment	Colonel Inkinen
J	12th Infantry Regiment	Colonel Hanste
K	Task Froce Forsberg	Colonel Forsberg
L	Task Force Björkman	Colonel Björkman
M	4th Infantry Division	Major-General Autti
N	25th Infantry Regiment	Lieutenant-Colonel Kuiri
O	5th Infantry Regiment	Colonel Pihlajamaa
P	53rd Infantry Regiment	Colonel Ravila
Q	3rd Infantry Division	Major-General Pajari

GERMAN FORCES

X	303rd Assault Gun Regiment	Captain Scherer



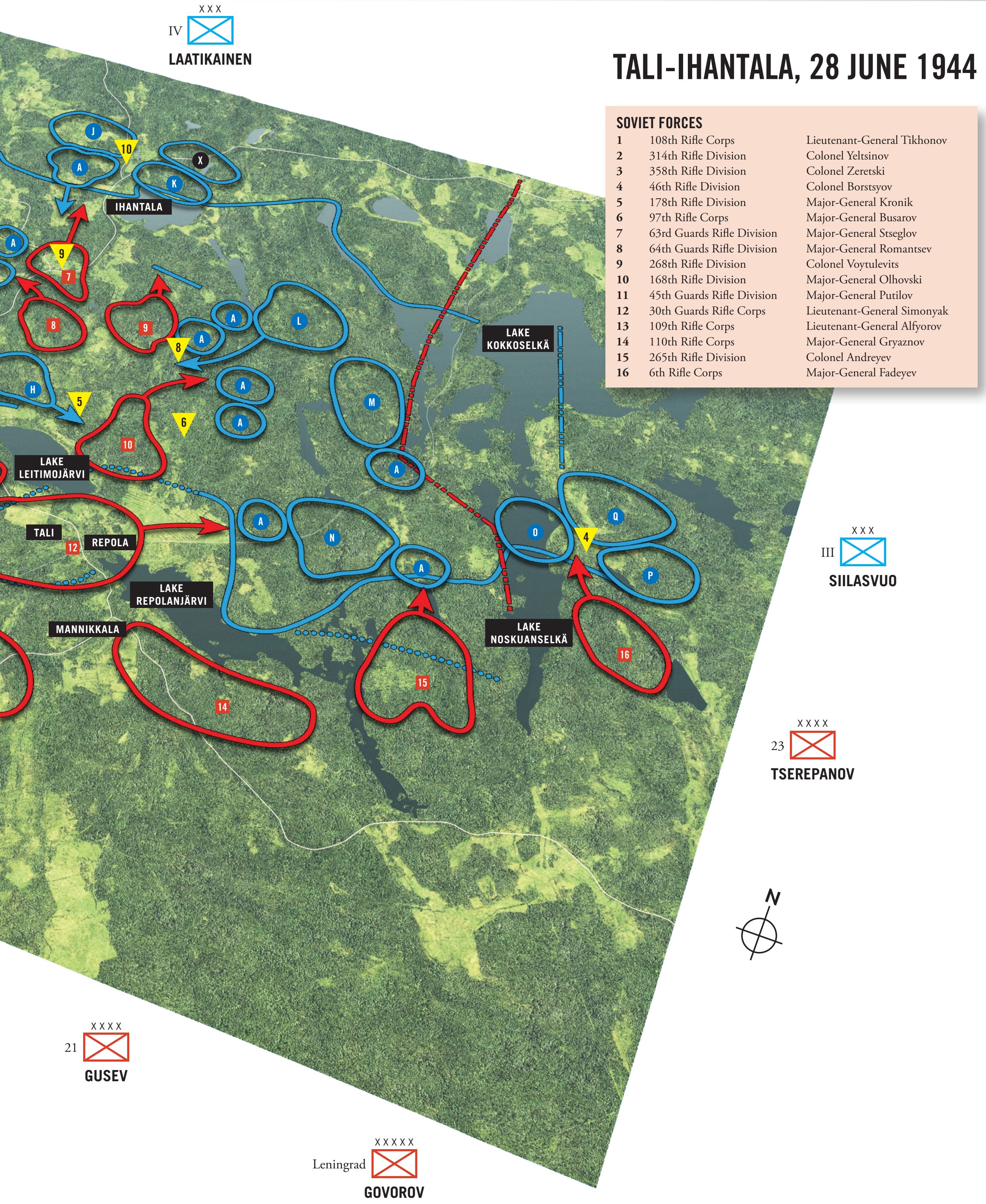
EVENTS

1. Following the fall of **Viipuri** on 20 June, the VKT Line at **Tammisuo** is soon breached by the 97th and 109th Rifle Corps.
2. 25 June: the 97th Rifle Corps breaches the defenses at **Härkävuori** and pushes towards **Lavola** at the mouth of **Saimaa Canal**.
3. 25 June: the Guards Division achieves a major breakthrough on both sides of **Lake Leitimojärvi**, reaching the critical crossroads at **Portinhoikka**.
4. 20–28 June: Soviet troops attack at **Näätälä** towards **Lake Kokkoselkä** in the north.
5. Counter-attacks by the **Jäger Brigade** through **Murokallio** towards the old defenses at **Aniskala** almost manage to cut off the Soviet spearheads on 26–28 June.
6. 27–28 June: under the pressure of Finnish counter-attacks, the Soviet bottleneck is constricted to 1km between **Kuusela** and **Talinmylly**.
7. 28 June: Group Lagus is formed from the elements of the Armoured Division, the 30th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion of the 50th Regiment.
8. Counter-attacks by Task Force Björkman gain lost ground on 28 June near **Lake Nurmijärvi**. A flanking move by the 168th Rifle Division forces the Finns to dig in for defense.
9. Task Force Forsberg routed by 63rd Guards Division on June 28, reaching all the way to **Soppi**.
10. The vanguard of Group Vihma arrives around **Pyörökangas** just in time just in time to stop the Soviet breakthrough on 28–29 June.
11. 29 June: the Fifty-Ninth Army is formed with the purpose of capturing the islands north of **Viipuri**. Initially the army could only commit a single division with meagre support for preparatory attacks. The main push on this front starts on 4 July.
12. Defensive positions stabilise on the **Juustila–Ihantala** line by 1 July.

TALI-IHANTALA, 28 JUNE 1944

SOVIET FORCES

1	108th Rifle Corps	Lieutenant-General Tikhonov
2	314th Rifle Division	Colonel Yeltsinov
3	358th Rifle Division	Colonel Zeretski
4	46th Rifle Division	Colonel Borstsyov
5	178th Rifle Division	Major-General Kronik
6	97th Rifle Corps	Major-General Busarov
7	63rd Guards Rifle Division	Major-General Stseglov
8	64th Guards Rifle Division	Major-General Romantsev
9	268th Rifle Division	Colonel Voytulevits
10	168th Rifle Division	Major-General Olhovski
11	45th Guards Rifle Division	Major-General Putilov
12	30th Guards Rifle Corps	Lieutenant-General Simonyak
13	109th Rifle Corps	Lieutenant-General Alfyorov
14	110th Rifle Corps	Major-General Gryaznov
15	265th Rifle Division	Colonel Andreyev
16	6th Rifle Corps	Major-General Fadeyev



BUBI THE ASSAULT GUN ACE

With 11 confirmed enemy tanks destroyed, Börje 'Bubi' Brotell was the most successful of the Finnish tank aces. Born in Turku, Finland, in 1922, Brotell began his service in the Civil Guards as an air observer and then volunteered for SS training in Germany. He served in the Caucasus region, and on his return to Finland was assigned to the newly established Assault Gun Battalion.

Brotell's tank victories started to accumulate during the massive Soviet offensive of 1944. On 25 June near Lake Leitimojärvi, a massive ISU-152 tank rose over an escarpment a mere 300 metres in front of Brotell's assault gun. He gave orders for his gunner to wait until the whole of the turret trundled clearly into view. The crew had already prearranged the first shell, and were aiming at the bottom joint of the turret. They fired, and the first salvo sailed straight through the side of the enemy tank. Soon one hatch opened and one Soviet disembarked. Brotell told his crew to wait and see if more enemies were about to alight. Since all was quiet up ahead he then gave orders to slowly advance. Soon Brotell spotted a second enemy tank left to secure the hill. With some rapid commands he then ensured that this second behemoth was also destroyed. In total five enemy tanks arrived and were destroyed by Brotell on this same spot. During the ten-hour battle the Finnish assault-gun unit destroyed 24 Soviet tanks, while only one their own vehicles was hit. On 29 June, during the Tali–Ihantala battles, Brotell guarded the otherwise undefended yet absolutely critical Portinhoikka crossroads by setting two Soviet T-34 tanks ablaze from 600 metres away.

On 11 July, the Assault Gun Battalion took part in the battle at Vuosalmi. There, one of Brotell's tank squad's vehicles was desperately trying to score a hit against the Soviet armour at the bottom of a deep ravine. Brotell again took the lead by destroying a T-34 on his first shot. Two nights later, five Soviet T-34/85 tanks managed to breach the Finnish lines. Brotell was dispatched to deal with the problem. During the hazy early hours of the Finnish summer night, he stalked and dispatched three of them; the last two enemy tanks were destroyed by infantry using Panzerfausts.

After the war, Brotell became a businessman, eventually establishing an import company for chemical products. He was finally laid to rest in 2009.

assault guns in the area. Together they proceeded to force the Soviet vanguard back towards the Portinhoikka area. There Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade from Lagus' Armoured Division finally relieved them, while proceeding to attack east of the lake towards Tali. According to the records of Twenty-First Army, its losses for this day alone exceeded 1,000 men. During the night, the Finns proceeded to destroy 38 tanks and captured seven more, which were later added to the Finnish arsenal, before the whole Armoured Division's counter-attack came to halt. The leading units suffered greatly, losing many of their light tanks, and were, at least for the time being, unable to launch any subsequent attacks.

Had the Finns been better coordinated when the Soviet attack began, the counter-measures could have been started sooner. In order to avoid a repeat of this, the commander of IV Army Corps, Laatikainen, put Lagus in charge of the defensive sectors of the 18th and Armoured divisions. Meanwhile the Soviet attack had stopped on all fronts, and in anticipation of a major Finnish counter-attack Simonyak ordered Major-General Afanasi Stseglov's 63rd Guards Rifle Division to advance and reinforce the

front of Romantsev's 64th Guards Rifle Division in the Murokallio-Kuusela area. As planned Gryaznov's fresh 110th Rifle Corps now relieved Alfyorov's 109th Rifle Corps in the Tali–Mannikkala area.

On 27 June, Heiskanen's 11th Division arrived from eastern Karelia to take over the defensive sector stretching between lakes Kärstilänjärvi and Leitimojärvi. This freed Lagus to give the following attack orders to the Armoured Division:

Tank commander Senior Sergeant Börje Brotell painting a seventh stripe to mark another victory with assault gun Ps 531-10 ('Bubi'), east of Ihantala, on 7 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

1. Puroma's 1st Jäger Brigade, including its four battalions and one heavy tank company, was to attack towards Aniskala and Kuusela.
2. The attack from Ihantala due south towards Nurmilampi and Kuusela was to be carried out by Forsberg's task force. This consisted of three infantry battalions and one company from the German 303rd Assault Gun Brigade.
3. Björkman, commander of the Armoured Brigade, was to gather his infantry heavy task force of four battalions and attack towards Talinmylly from the north-east. Autti's 4th Division was also given orders to support this attack from the direction of Lake Kokkoselkä.

The plan was to perform this attack simultaneously from all directions, supported by all available Finnish artillery in the area. Lagus' goal was to cut the potent 63rd and 64th Guards Rifle divisions off into a large *motti.* In the end, Puroma's Jäger managed to place the Soviet supply route at Aniskala under fire, but not to cut it. Despite all of its firepower, Lagus' division was unable to provide sufficient fire support for the infantry to proceed much further. The situation was not helped by the German assault guns, which had quickly exhausted their ammunition by firing wildly into the woods, and were forced to turn back

The whole crew of 'Bubi' on 7 July 1944: (from left to right) Senior Sergeant Brotell, Tanker Launikko, Corporal Soimala and Corporal Kauppi. Note the improvised wooden protection that the Finns have attached to their assault gun. (Sa-Kuva)

Junkers Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers of Detachment Kuhlmey fly over Immola airbase on 2 July 1944. In the foreground, a Focke-Wulf 190 from the same unit is being rearmed and refuelled. (Sa-kuva)

for resupply. At Talinmylly the Soviet-controlled zone was constricted to only a 1km-wide wedge. The bridgehead there remained open only due to the united efforts of the armoured forces, the artillery and ground-attack planes. Despite all of the Finnish attacks being halted during the night, Commander of the Isthmus Forces Oesch still believed that it would be possible to contain and possibly even destroy the enemy units north of Leitimojärvi.

On 28 June, Oesch decided to form two centres of attack. Group Lagus would control elements of the Armoured Division, Lieutenant-Colonel Eino Polón's 30th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Battalion from Lieutenant-Colonel Martti Aho's 50th Infantry Regiment. Lagus' mission was to advance along the eastern shores of Lake Leitimojärvi and recapture the old defenses north of Tali.

Meanwhile in the Ihantala area, the second group, led by and named after the newly arrived commander of the 6th Division, Major-General Einar Vihma (whose main body of troops were still on their way from the Aunus front), consisted of Lieutenant-Colonel Inkinen's 6th Infantry

(1893–1959)

PIETARI AUTTI

MAJOR-GENERAL
4TH DIVISION

After taking part in the *Ausbildungsgruppe* (Practice Group) Locksted camp for Jäger and fighting for the Royal Prussian Army, Pietari Aleksanteri Autti returned to Finland as a Jäger ensign. After commanding a squadron in the Civil War he proceeded to take part in the Petsamo expedition during the Kinship Wars. In the Winter War Autti gained fame in *motti* battles as the commander of the 39th Brigade.

During the Summer War, Autti received a Mannerheim Cross for showing personal bravery. At the time of the decisive battles on the Karelian Isthmus, Major-General Autti commanded the 4th Division. This unit had been one of Mannerheim's personal reserves but was soon deployed to counter the enemy at the VKT Line and at Tali–Ihantala.

Autti was arrested in connection to the Weapons Cache case, but was released when the allegations against him proved fabricated. From 1948, Autti served as the commander of the 3rd Division until his retirement with the rank of lieutenant-general in 1953.

Regiment, Colonel Yrjö Hanste's 12th Infantry Regiment and an additional three battalions, some of Lagus' tanks operating in the area as well as the German 303rd Assault Gun Brigade. Vihma's task was to attack south of Ihantalanjärvi and destroy the two Guards divisions holding the area around Talinmylly. These two strike forces were supported by the 4th and 11th divisions on their flanks.

While the Finns prepared, the Soviets stole the initiative from them, continuing their attacks on the north side of Leitimojärvi. This routed Task Force Forsberg, and Stseglov's 63rd Guards Rifle Division was able to advance within 1km of the Ihantala crossroads, where Group Vihma finally halted the Soviet spearhead. Meanwhile on Vihma's left flank, Task Force Björkman managed to attack in the direction of Nurmilampi on the flanks of Voytulevits' 268th and Major-General Pjotr I. Olhovski's 168th Rifle divisions. There Björkman even forced the enemy to retreat, regaining some ground lost earlier. Meanwhile the Soviets had attacked first on Lagus' front as well, but during the battles that lasted through the night the Finns managed to hold on to the Murokallio–Aniskala area. As a result of these demanding encounters, the defenses of the heavily committed Finnish Armoured Division started to crack.

(1893–1944)

EINAR VIHMA

MAJOR-GENERAL

6TH DIVISION

Einar August Vihma (born Wichmann) was part of the first Jäger recruitment of 1915. He returned to Finland early, and began training the Civil Guards in Kuopio. During the Civil War, Vihma took part in the fighting at Varkaus and Viipuri, and was promoted to lieutenant. Vihma reached the rank of colonel in 1933, and spent three years as head of the Finnish Cadet School. From 1936 to 1939 Vihma was the official commander of the White Guards.

At the outbreak of the Winter War, Vihma took over the 1st Brigade, and was transferred to lead the 10th Division in December. From 9 January 1940 to the end of the Winter War, Vihma commanded the 7th Division.

During the Interim Peace, Vihma was commander of the Helsinki District. Upon the outbreak of the Continuation War, Vihma initially led the 12th Division for the assault phase. On 18 December 1941, he assumed command of the 6th Division. As an iron-willed front-line commander, Vihma saw a lot of action, fighting personally alongside his men, for this bravery and his accomplishments he was awarded the Mannerheim Cross on 12 October 1941.

Vihma played a crucial role at the battle of Tali–Ihantala. His 6th Division arrived in the nick of time, and managed to turn the course of the war; with his help, Lagus' Armoured Division was re-galvanised and the defences held. During the battle, Group Vihma was formed to coordinate counter-attacks and the Finnish defences. This proved effective, as his men proceeded to destroy numerous enemy tanks and assault guns.

On 5 August 1944, Major-General Vihma and his chief of staff were killed by a Soviet mortar strike near Ihantala Church. He was the only Finnish general to die in action. Vihma's death saved him from the court case that was being built against him for allegedly ordering the execution of deserters. He received a hero's burial.

The Soviet Guards elite troops, although nearly surrounded, were simply too strong to overcome, and at Talinmylly their irresistible force had now started widening the neck of their bridgehead, putting a stop to the Finnish encirclement attempts. Tank ace and *Sotka* gunner Reino Lehväslaiho remembers the heady days of Tali–Ihantala as follows:

Finnish soldier by a KV-1 m/1942 on 4.7.1944. This tank had been captured and repatriated near Syväri power plant in the Spring of 1942.

(1900–1971)

MICHAEL TIKHONOV
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
108TH RIFLE CORPS

Michael Fyodorovich Tikhonov volunteered for the Red Army as a private on 4 October 1918, and soon saw combat as a cavalry squad commander on the Southern Front. During the 1920s and 1930s, Tikhonov held several posts within the cavalry. When the Great Patriotic war began, he first led the 7th Airborne Regiment and then 2nd Airborne Corps on the Soviet Western Front. Over the following two years he led several different Guards and Airborne corps on different fronts.

Tikhonov was appointed to lead the 108th Rifle Corps in January 1944 and held this post until August the same year. His troops took part in the attack against the VT Line at Vammelsuu, the conquest of Viipuri and the final days of the Tali–Ihantala fighting.

In 1953 Tikhonov became the Soviet military attaché to Hungary and chief military advisor until 1957. He resigned from service in 1962.

(1899–1969)

AFANASI GRYAZNOV
MAJOR-GENERAL
110TH RIFLE CORPS

Afanasi Sergeyevich Gryaznov rose through the ranks of the Red Army from a lowly start as a private in 1918 to graduating from the General Staff Academy in 1939. In October 1939, he became the chief of staff for the 67th Rifle Division. At start of the Great Patriotic War, he worked closely with Timoshenko and led the 1st Guards Rifle Corps. Promoted to major-general in January 1942, he was dishonourably discharged from his post by Stavka only four months later, following his troops' failure to encircle the German Sixteenth Army. What followed were more command positions in different corps at many of the Red Army's fronts until being appointed to the 110th Rifle Corps on 15 April 1944. In 1946, Gryaznov became a senior lecturer at the Voroshilov Military Academy. He retired due to his age in 1954.

All our tank companies were committed. Every day men and tanks were lost forever. Counter-attack after counter-attack, again and again, those of us still left gathered our strength in order to fulfil our orders, certain of the fact that in these battles even the most experienced of us would meet their end. Hardened and without pity for themselves the tank crews waged their war. There were no deserters in these companies. We were immediately informed when any of the original crewmen were lost. Captain Mikkola was mortally wounded. Torp wounded. Rantanen taken to the dressing station. Manskinen on his way to a field hospital in the rear. Pelttari fought his last battle on the Ihantala road, this sergeant died from anti-tank rifle fire. Lieutenant Oesch was killed by a machine-gun spree. Young men took the places of those gone before, and the war went on and on. We advanced a kilometre and retreated two. More ammunition … more fuel and again the tanks attacked. We were tired and dirty … nothing seemed to matter anymore. Men spoke less and less. When the order to advance arrived, we sat in our places, drove, and fired until the guns shimmered red; this was the work of a tankie. At times we collapsed sleeping next to our tanks … only to hear soon again … Counter-attack! We were deadly tired. There was no time to sleep. We slept under our tanks; this was our home. We had no idea what time it was. Somebody nudged us awake … *Sotkas* to counter-attack! (Lehväslaiho, 1958)

Then, in Finland's darkest hour, when all hope seemed lost, long-awaited

HANS WIND

Hans 'Hasse' Henrik Wind was one of only six double-recipients of the Mannerheim Cross. Wind's 77 confirmed victories make him officially the second-highest scoring non-German ace, after his compatriot Ilmari Juutilainen. In 1938, Wind volunteered for pilot's training, but due to the lack of available aircraft he did not get to fly any combat missions during the Winter War. Hasse completed his reservist officer's training in the summer of 1941, thus enabling him to join the 24th Fighter Squadron for the next two years. Wind became famous for his feats with a Brewster B-239 fighter plane, receiving his first Mannerheim Cross on 31 July 1943. By then he had amassed 33 aerial victories, completed long-range scouting missions into the enemy's rear, and had supported the infantry, for instance, by destroying two locomotives.

In April 1944, Wind was issued with the far more modern Messerschmitt Bf 109. During the final 13 days before he was wounded, he shot down 27 enemy aircraft. Wind recounted his wounding, on what turned out to be his last combat flight:

'It happened on 28 June 1944 … Headquarters insisted on receiving aerial reconnaissance along the Tali–Leningrad railroad, in order to find out whether fresh enemy reinforcements were on their way … We knew from the start that this would be a nearly impossible mission, as the skies were full of enemy pilots. But orders are orders … I took off, together with Warrant Officer Nils Katajainen … We had barely reached the Viipuri area when we were struck by seven enemy fighters, Yak-9s … More Soviet aircraft kept appearing … Everything turned into a crazy furball … As soon as I got the first Yak in my sights, it went plummeting down like a burning torch … four other enemy craft went the same way … One [Airacobra] that had already received several bullets from me, now managed to score a direct hit on my cockpit. The exploding shells shattered all my gauges and instruments, and I was badly wounded in the process. I can't remember anything from the rest of the battle but I have been told that I immediately rose to 3,500m and proceeded to coast towards our home airfield.' (Sariola, 1969)

On the day he was wounded, Wind was knighted for a second time. Following his recovery from injury, he did not return to the front and in 1945 he resigned from the armed forces.

Hans Wind (1919–1995). (Sa-Kuva)

reinforcements started to gather on the north side of Ihantala. These troops were the first formations of Vihma's 6th Division, which had finally arrived from Ladoga Karelia.

With the fresh help of the 6th Division, the breach created by the 30th Guards Rifle Division was finally contained and the situation brought back under control. The Soviet lines, however, could still not be broken, nor the troops inside the encirclement completely cut off, and so the front took on a shape resembling that of an irregular horseshoe. As this form tied up vast

amounts of the Finnish defenders, the line had to be quickly straightened. With this in mind, Oesch gave the command that the VKT Line would now be pulled back from Tali to Ihantala, which would merely create a small bend in the line rather than the current deep pocket. This was going to be a new, and final, main line of defence.

THE LAST LINE OF DEFENCE

During 29 June, the retreat to the new defensive lines happened in the midst of intense combat, under a constant Soviet artillery barrage and strikes from ground-attack planes. The 6th Division took over larger sections of the central Ihantala sector, while the already worn-down defenders fortified positions on both flanks. The stability of this rearrangement was repeatedly challenged by Soviet tanks. In the thick of battle were the troops of Task Force Hanste, comprising Hanste's 12th Infantry Regiment. These men fought delaying battles, allowing the rest of the Finns time to take up the new positons. When the unit finally ran out of Panzerfausts, enemy tanks penetrated the line, and Task Force Hanste was forced to retreat to the new main line. The story goes that when the Soviet tanks were advancing and the Finns were almost routed, Vihma had his driver take his shiny black Buick on a tour, delivering Panzerfausts to the men at the front. 'Thank you, General, Sir! We had pretty much run out!' uttered one amazed yet grateful battalion commander. Again, the Soviet forces at the apex of this area (63rd Guards Rifle Division and 168th Rifle Division, flanked by 64th Guards Rifle Division and 268th Rifle Division) attempted a breakthrough. Vihma's men were to withstand the full force of this attack.

By the morning of 30 June, the line had been stabilised into a shallow curve. The front was then segmented according to Oesch's plans, and at the same time most of the Finnish artillery was allocated to Group Vihma's use. They could now coordinate and concentrate the nation's firepower against the

East of Ihantala, a lightly armed bicycle detachment is shown on their way to execute a desperate counter-strike on 7 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Soviet tanks as they attempted to push through the curve. In theory Vihma could now employ 20 artillery batteries and one additional heavy battery on any given point of his front. At times, it still looked like the Guards divisions would breach the lines after all, but by now the Finns had received enough reinforcements to set up positions to a depth of 2–4km. During the day, the Soviets attacked with all their might against Pyöräkangas and Ihantala. The most potent of these attempts were, however, nipped in the bud by six to twelve Finnish batteries concentrating their salvoes. Towards nighttime, the Soviets' own considerable artillery began a preparatory bombardment at Ihantala. After the barrage the infantry and 20 heavy tanks raced in to attack. Lieutenant-Colonel Arvo Roininen, the commander of the 26th Heavy Battery, recalled how the Soviet vanguard was stopped, saving the whole Finnish line from collapsing against Stseglov's 63rd Guards Rifle Division:

Finnish tank crew and infantry help a wounded comrade. In the Soviet infantry, a long-term career was almost guaranteed to end in invalidity or death; belonging to a tank crew meant facing extreme danger. Of the 402,272 trained tankers (including a small number of women) in the Red Army, about 310,000 would die or be seriously injured by the end of the Great Patriotic War. (Merridale, 2005) (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

> The enemy attack preparations were again under way, and my forward observers along the Portinhoikka–Ihantala road had already directed fire against multiple targets. Then they suddenly radioed me: 'Enemy tanks are in their jumping off points … all batteries fire!' Everybody, but my own artillery observation team has already abandoned this base, what should we do?[7] My orders to the Forward Observing Officer were: 'Stay where you are, we are going to shell some more!' I then quickly rang the Commander of Artillery explaining the situation. Upon hearing what I had to say, the concentrated fire from all the available artillery was immediately committed into counter-bombardment, which halted the Soviet attack … Eventually the infantry returned back to defend their bases. (Sinerma, Ahto and Rönkkönen, 1989, pp. 368–69)

In the end, the enemy infantry was quelled by artillery and mortar shelling, while most of the tanks were hit by Panzerfausts and Panzerschrecks. During

7 After the Soviet preliminary bombardment began, all of the infantry, who were exhausted and shell-shocked, withdrew from the area, leaving the front completely undefended.

Soldiers belonging to the Soviet Guards had won the privilege of wearing their enamelled Guards symbol and medals into battle.

the day, the Finnish infantry destroyed 24 enemy tanks in the Ihantala area alone, whilst Detachment Kuhlmey wrecked another 20 east of the village. Finally Finland's anti-tank measures were sufficient to control the battlefields.

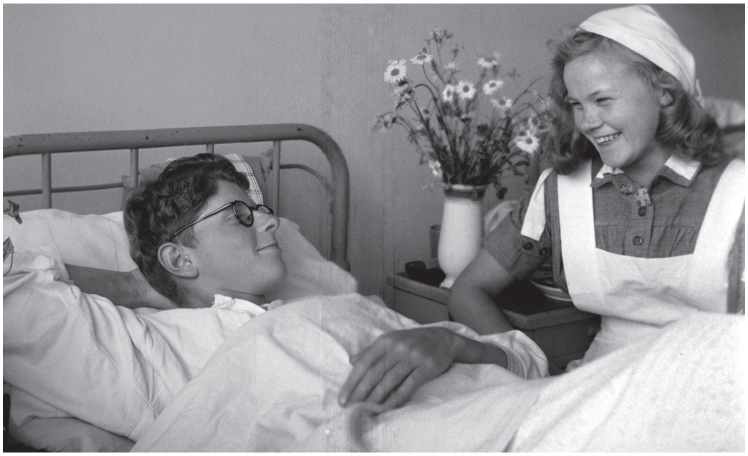
The most daunting phase of the epic battle of Tali–Ihantala had now ended. With their tenacious defence and personal sacrifice, the Finns managed to contain the Soviet breach into a 10km-deep and 10km-wide wedge. They lacked the strength to surround and destroy the seven enemy divisions that had made it this far after the line had been originally broken at Tali. Finnish forces had given their utmost, but had withstood all that the world's most powerful army had to offer. In front of the most potent armoured units in the world, the Finns performed a fighting retreat to a new main line. The last line of defence had been bent at Tali, but was not broken.

BEHIND THE DEFENSIVE VICTORIES

On 29 June, Govorov came to the conclusion that the Twenty-First Army was unlikely to achieve the breach necessary. Based on this assessment, he gave orders for Korovnikov's newly formed Fifty-Ninth Army to cross Viipuri Bay, while Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army would cross the Vuoksi River at Äyräpää. The preparatory attacks at Äyräpää, however, took too long, and before the main assault could begin Tsherepanov was replaced on 3 July by Lieutenant-General Basil Svetsov.

By the evening of 30 June, Govorov's nightmares had become reality and the Finns had consolidated their positions on a new line running Lavola–Ventelänselkä–Vakkila–Ihantala–Lake Kokkoselkä. Although the attacks against IV Army Corps lines would continue, the forces were now much better balanced. The main contributing factor was that during early July the pressure started to slowly abate as the Red Army began transferring surplus units towards the German front. Stavka had given up its plans for a speedy conquest of Finland. During the Tali–Ihantala battles, the Finns had been strongly reinforced and rearmed while the Soviets had suffered great losses.

Junior Sergeant Paul Renvall and Senior Sergeant Kurt Engman from the 2nd Battalion of the 131st Infantry Regiment are shown in the Lavola area on 28 July 1944. Of these two 'Tigers of Tali', Renval managed to kill one and Engman four heavy enemy tanks. Neither had received more than 10 minutes' briefing on their new weapons before the first opportunity to become a hero of the nation had presented itself. (Sa-Kuva)



The son of Major-General Ruben Lagus, Corporal Olaf Lagus served in his father's Armoured Division, gaining fame as the gunner of assault gun 'Marjatta' (Ps 531–19). On 14 June 1944, in the Kuuterselkä fighting, he destroyed (in under ten minutes) an enemy machine-gun emplacement, four T-34/85 tanks and an anti-tank gun with its crew. Shortly after this amazing baptism by fire, he was wounded. He is here seen recovering at Kiljavanummi Hospital on 10 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

On 4 July, near Ihantala, concentrated Finnish artillery helped to halt a Soviet attack, leaving nearly 1,000 dead.

For this battle, the Finns had amassed most of their army's artillery. By using the targeting device known as the *Korjausmuunnin* (trajectory corrector) developed by the Inspector of Artillery General Vilho Nenonen, the front-line observers were able to coordinate and concentrate the fire of multiple batteries. This was a technological feat unique to any of the fighting forces of that time. Between 29 June and 6 July, the Finnish artillery managed to repeatedly halt and destroy enemy concentrations still assembling at their jumping-off points. On 30 such occasions the forces destroyed were larger than battalion size. These successes, and the efforts of the pilots, helped to bolster the infantry's fighting spirit, instilling belief in victory once more. In the end, their *sisu* was the decisive factor in winning the Tali–Ihantala battles.

At the end of July, the German troops on the Karelian Isthmus were recalled. The 122nd Infantry Division and the 303rd Assault Gun Brigade (which had destroyed a mere three or four enemy tanks) had only engaged briefly; in contrast, the Luftwaffe forces had played an important role in the defensive victories.

In addition to the 26 assault guns that the German 303rd Assault Gun Brigade had deployed, the Finns commanded 23 tanks and 20 assault guns of their own. Against these the Soviets had pitted 280 tanks and 80 assault guns. During the heady days of Tali–Ihantala, the Red Army lost a total of 210 tanks and assault guns. Out of these, the Armoured Division destroyed 53, Task Force Björkman 22, Detachment Kuhlmey 63 and troops of Group Vihma 41, with the rest falling victim to the artillery and mines. Only three Finnish tanks were destroyed by the Red Army. In the skies, the Finnish Air Force operated 100 planes with Detachment Kuhlmey and other formations flying 80 more. In the end, 12 of the Finnish and 33 of the Luftwaffe planes were shot down. The Red Army enjoyed air dominance with its 800 planes, although out of these 415 were destroyed. Two hundred and seventy of the aerial victories belonged to the Finnish Air Force, 30 to Detachment Kuhlmey, and 115 were shot down by anti-aircraft artillery. (Karjalainen, 2002)

The battles of Tali–Ihantala involved 50,000 Finnish, 4,000 German and approximately 150,000 Soviet soldiers. During the two weeks of combat, the Finnish artillery fired over 12,000 shells. The rapid rate of fire ruined many of their gun barrels in the process. The Finns suffered 1,350 dead, over 6,000 wounded and nearly 1,100 missing in action. According to the Soviets' own, often downplayed, official numbers they had lost the following: 30th Guards Rifle Corps: 1,666 dead, 7,204 wounded, 174 missing. A total of 9,044 casualties. 110th Rifle Corps: 1,350 dead, 5,454 wounded. A total of 6,804 casualties. 108th Rifle Corps: the already decimated unit suffered 1,143 dead or missing in just two days of fighting. (Raunio and Kilin, 2013) 97th Rifle Corps had heavy losses of men daily, but no overall data is available. The total Soviet losses were estimated at around 6,000 dead and 22,000 wounded.

THE LANDINGS IN VIIPURI BAY

Although pressure was being maintained on the Tali–Ihantala front, this was no longer a Soviet priority. The Soviet armies under Govorov's command were to concentrate breakthrough attempts at Vuosalmi, Noskua and in Viipuri Bay. Korovnikov's Fifty-Ninth Army had been shipped to the front for this purpose at the end of June. Korovnikov was tasked with capturing the outlying islands in the bay from Svensson's V Army Corps. The first Soviet attempt to cross the bay took place during the night of 30 June. This attack was repelled at Teikarsaari Island by Colonel Arvo Lyytinen's 22nd Coastal Artillery Regiment. Lyytinen's troops suffered heavily for this temporary victory. Soon buoyed by around 100 vessels, the Soviets would try to repeat the landings they had performed over ice during the Winter War. If successful, the units could then swing to both east and west and pose a dire threat to the whole defence of the isthmus.

Late on 3 July, a major Soviet assault across the width of the bay began. Defence of the islands and the coastline was divided between the Coastal Brigade of the Eastern Gulf of Finland, led by Colonel Armas Enkainen, and Tähtinen's Cavalry Brigade. In the Cavalry Brigade's sector the islands of Uuras and Suonionsaari were soon occupied, and once their counter-attack failed, the brigade had to abandon these islands. A further attack aimed at slowing the Soviet advance was then carried out by the Finnish Navy over the following two days. These ships had to withdraw under heavy bombardment and ceaseless air raids, although none of the Finnish vessels were sunk. On the morning of 5 July, the Enkainen's Coastal Brigade was still in control of Teikarsaari and Melansaari islands, after having repelled repeated Soviet landing attempts. During the day, though, overwhelming

forces meant that the Finns had to abandon these islands. The following day, the commander of V Army Corps had the German 122nd Infantry Division, led by Major-General Hero Breusing, take over the remaining defensive positions from the Cavalry Brigade. These men were sent to the reserves and only one of its infantry regiments, comprising solely Estonian volunteers, was to remain in the defence of the coast.

The Soviets attempted one more major landing in the 122nd Infantry Division's sector near the mouth of the Tervajoki River on 9 July. The Germans halted the attack and reluctantly the Leningrad Front gave the Fifty-Ninth Army orders to switch to defence. Eventually, the Soviets managed to occupy all the key islands in Viipuri Bay, with especially fierce fighting taking place on Teikarsaari Island. In the end, however, they did not manage to create a bridgehead to the coast of Finland, and by 10 July, all attacks along the bay had ceased.

THE BATTLES FOR NOSKUA AND ÄYRÄPÄÄ–VUOSALMI

During the withdrawal phase in June, Siilasvuo's III Army Corps had taken up defensive positions along the eastern end of the VKT Line. Maskula's 19th Brigade was positioned nearest to Lake Ladoga at Taipale, Hersalo's 15th Division in the middle while Martola's 2nd Division (Martola would take over from Blick as commander of VI Army Corps on 7 July) held the Äyräpää–Vuosalmi sector on the left flank of IV Corps. There Pajari's 3rd Division held the Kuparsaari area, while west of Lake Noskua Autti's 4th Division remained guarding the edge of the Ihantala curve in the lines.

As dictated by Govorov, Tsherepanov's Twenty-Third Army would no longer play a diversionary role, but would rather carry all the hopes of the Red Army for a decisive breakthrough. To this end, Fadeyev's 6th Rifle Corps was to capture

Finnish soldiers observing the fires at the western end of Viipuri from across the bay at Sorvali on 4 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

(1898–1954)

IVAN FADEYEV
MAJOR-GENERAL
6TH RIFLE CORPS

Ivan Ivanovich Fadeyev began his military career as a common soldier in the Tsar's army in 1917. His stellar career progression resulted in a rank of major-general by 4 June 1940.

From the onset of the Finnish offensive, Fadeyev led the 125th Rifle Division of the Leningrad Front. On 3 June 1944, he was handed command of the 6th Rifle Corps, taking part in the famous battles for control of Noskua. Fadeyev remained in this role until December 1944. He resigned from active service in July 1953 for health reasons.

the Noskua area, while Lieutenant-General George Anisimov's 98th Rifle Corps would attack Äyräpää, driving the Finns into the Vuoksi River. The 6th Rifle Corps was to split its forces in an attack around both sides of Lake Noskuanselkä. On the western side of the lake, Colonel Armas Pihlajamaa's 5th Infantry Regiment from 4th Division waited, while the rest of Autti's troops were still needed at Tali–Ihantala. On the eastern side of Lake Noskuanselkä the brunt of Fadeyev's attack was met by Pajari's 3rd Division.

On 20 June, Fadeyev ordered Major-General Serge Alexandrov's 13th and Colonel Peter Yeftimenkov's 382nd Rifle divisions to attack through Näätälä and past Lake Kokkoselkä, and to capture the distant Kavantsaari road that same day. These commands must have assumed that Finnish resistance had been completely broken, as this interim target was nearly 10km to the north. The first day of the attack did not go well for the Soviets despite these two divisions receiving support from the 952nd Assault Gun Regiment, the 226th Tank Regiment and the 46th Guards Heavy Tank Breakthrough Regiment. As this section of the Finnish lines still held, Fadeyev was forced to repeat the same battle orders the following night. These attacks again achieved only limited success by capturing a section of the defensive line at Riikolanvuori just south-east of Lake Noskunaselkä. The slow pace of success then prompted Fadeyev to throw in his reserves: Colonel Basil Rzanov's 177th Rifle Division was to combine forces with the 382nd Rifle Division at Riikolanvuori. Over the next few days all of the 6th Rifle Corps' attacks faltered in the face of amassed and accurate Finnish artillery. The Soviets' own operations were hindered by the continual lack of ammunition that had resulted from the small quantity of trucks made available for Fadeyev's supply.

On 26 June, Fadeyev's men were to attempt their last breakthrough attack. After a 55-minute preliminary bombardment, the Soviet formations set to work. In several places they managed to achieve small openings in the Finnish lines, but a decisive breach still eluded them. The war diary of the Finnish 53rd Infantry Regiment describes just how close 6th Rifle Corps came to victory:

> 27.6. 16:00 Message from the 3rd Division [from Pajari] to the commander of the 53rd Infantry Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Ravia is to immediately,

> and until further notice, take his place on the front line, gathering up the last of the reserves and any elements of his regiment in the rear. Their mission is to completely regain the [defensive] line. 53rd Infantry Regiment and the other units under its command must hold their ground no matter what, the men and their commander are to fight to the very last.

After 28 June, the now almost completely spent 6th Rifle Corps started to reduce its efforts. Although several artillery barrages still followed, this section of the front soon settled into a period of trench warfare. During the battle for Noskua, Fadeyev's 6th Rifle Corps diminished from 11,694 men at the start to around 4,000, losing an average of 800 men per day.

(1895–1984)

ALEXANDER TSHEREPANOV

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
TWENTY-THIRD ARMY

Alexander Ivanovich Tsherepanov was a company commander during World War I. He also took part in the storming of the Winter Palace in the Red Guards' ranks. Several senior military roles followed in the Far East, including combat operations with his division in northern China.

In November 1939, Tsherepanov became a senior lecturer at the General Staff Academy. Once trench warfare had set in, Tsherepanov transferred to command the Twenty-Third Army on the Karelian Isthmus on 9 September 1941. He was promoted to lieutenant-general in 1943 and commanded the second wave of Soviet forces in the main offensive of 1944. His army's progress on the eastern Karelian Isthmus and especially around Noskua failed to impress the Leningrad Front leadership and Tsherepanov was fired from his post on 3 July 1944.

After his dismissal, Tsherepanov was vice-chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Bulgaria. In May 1948, he became the Deputy Head of the Higher Military Educational Institutions for Scientific Research. He resigned from active service in November 1955.

Earlier in June, during the fighting around Siiranmäki for control of the VT Line, Martola's 2nd Division had held out against all odds, losing around 1,000 men in the process. Since then Martola had been steadily receiving reinforcements, and at this stage of war his unit was in sore need of rest instead of further fighting. However, 2nd Division's retreat from the VT Line had been constantly dogged by Anisimov's 98th Rifle Corps. The three divisions under Anisimov's control (Colonel George Isakov's 281st Rifle Division, Major-General Alexander Yakusov's 381st Rifle Division and Major-General Jacob Panitskin's 92nd Rifle Division bringing up the rear) had been given a mission to destroy the retreating Finnish troops, now attempting to escape across the Vuoksi River. On 21 June, Anisimov finally caught up with his prey as his men reached the Finnish positions in front of Äyräpää and Kyläpaakkola. These two bases had been left as outposts by Martola's 2nd Division on the hostile side of the Vuoksi. The Soviets immediately began probing attacks in order to establish the weaknesses in the Finnish defences.

Surprisingly, for the next few weeks, the front remained relatively quiet on the eastern side of the Karelian Isthmus, even in III Army Corps' Vuoksi–Taipale sector. At the bridgehead, on the south side of the Vuoksi River, the Finns resisted several Soviet assaults by relying on their extremely accurate artillery fire.

On 4 July, the 98th Army Corps launched the first truly concentrated effort to capture the Äyräpää bases. Against Anisimov's three infantry divisions, the Finns could only offer weary battalions from Martola's 2nd Division. The battle for this bridgehead lasted five days and cost the defenders around 3,000 casualties. In the end, the Finns had to yield and retreated to the other side of the Vuoksi. Capturing the ridge at Äyräpää had also cost the Soviets dearly; after this, Anisimov's corps was practically unable to continue fighting, with its losses estimated at around 5,300 men, of whom over 1,000 were dead.

On 9 July, with heavy artillery and air support, the newly arrived 115th Rifle Corps, led by Major-General Serge Kozatshek, succeeded finally in crossing the river. The Soviets now managed to create a small bridgehead on the Finnish side of the Vuoksi. During the following day the majority of the corps' forces crossed the river, starting the next stage of assaults towards Antrea and Räisälä on 11 July.

By that time, most of Lagus' Armoured Division had been freed from Tali–Ihantala area and now arrived to reinforce the Vuosalmi line. The Assault Gun Battalion and the 1st Jäger Brigade began their own counter-attack against the enemy bridgehead at the same time as the Soviets were preparing to move out. Despite fresh reinforcements from both the 98th and 115th Rifle corps, the Finns managed to contain the Soviet breach in a 6km-wide and 3km-deep landing zone. From there Kozatshek's 115th Rifle Corps was unable to proceed further and both sides again settled in for defence. By 17 July, the attacks had dwindled to nothing. The following day the Soviet artillery shelled the Finnish positions heavily, but they did not seem to have any more interest in a futile infantry attack.

Company commander Lieutenant Tasa takes stock after his men return from a successful yet exhausting effort to repel a Soviet landing on 4 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

The attempt of breaking through the VKT Line had failed throughout the III Army Corps sector. During the Vuosalmi battles, the Finns deployed nearly 20,000 men. Against these defenders the Soviets sent more than nine divisions, outnumbering the Finns

by almost 3:1, with more than four times their heavy weapons. According to the Finnish reports from the time, they had suffered over 9,000 casualties while the Soviets lost over 13,000 men.

The Finns had withstood the best efforts of the Red Army on all frontal sectors. The VKT Line had held, although the enemy had temporarily breached it at Tali–Ihantala and at Vuosalmi. From mid-July onwards, the whole of the Karelian Isthmus settled back into trench warfare. At the same time, Stavka ordered the transfer of all available troops to the German front. This in turn allowed the Finns to free up more troops to support the defenders north of Ladoga. What the Red Army failed to take with its weapons, it finally obtained when the armistice was agreed in September 1944 when the Finnish withdrew along the line. Meanwhile, Meretskov's Karelian Front was not ready to throw in the towel; his forces would continue to press the Finns along both the Aunus and Maaselkä fronts.

During the battles in Viipuri Bay in 1944, the Finnish Navy tried to slow down the advancing Soviets. Due to the heavy bombardment and threat of air attack, the counter-attack did not succeed. The only Finnish casualty was an old fishing trawler, the *Conan Doyle*, which had been refurbished with captured Soviet guns and renamed *Viena*. The ship was badly damaged but managed to limp back to Helsinki for repairs. The Finnish Navy used such modified commercial vessels to boost its flotilla. Many were also able to deploy depth charges and sported a variety of guns. (SA-Kuva)

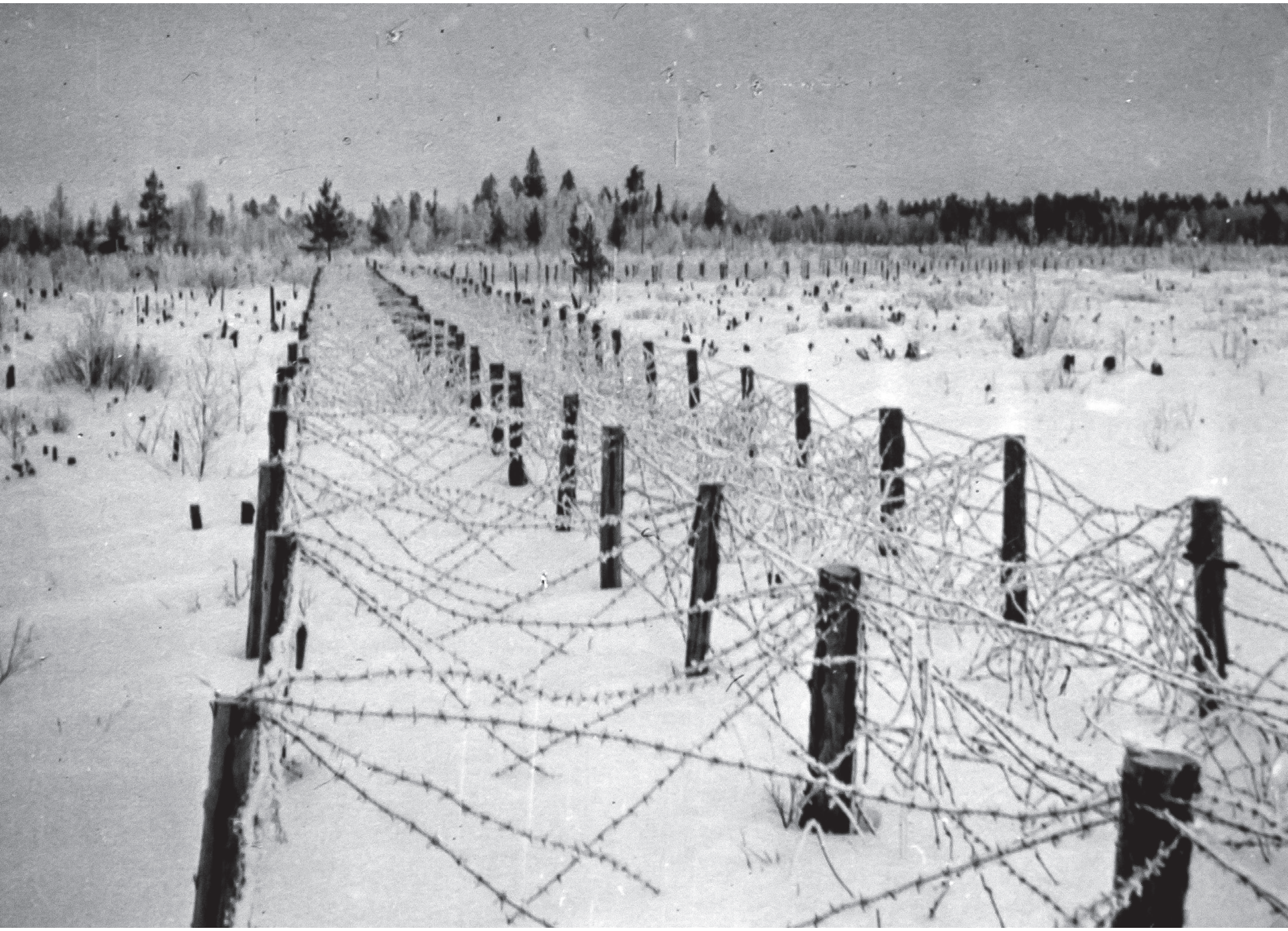
CHAPTER 11

WITHDRAWAL FROM SOVIET KARELIA

During the first half of June, once the Soviet plans for the main attack on the Karelian Isthmus became clear, the two Finnish defensive lines at the Syväri and Maaselkä isthmuses were stripped to provide reinforcements for the Karelian Isthmus. In total, the defences north of Ladoga were halved from eight divisions and three brigades to four divisions and two brigades. The units transferred comprised V Army Corps headquarters; the 4th, 6th, 11th and 17th divisions; and 20th Brigade.

On 14 June, Talvela took command of the troops on the Syväri front, Aunus Group. This included the remaining elements of Blick's VI Army Corps, namely Major-General Kustaa Tapola's 5th, Major-General Selim Isakson's 7th and Major-General Antti Kääriäinen's 8th divisions, in addition to the 15th Brigade. After Talvela's transfer to this new role, his former

Finnish artillery moving through Mäkriä village in 1943. A year later these same men were forced back in haste, fearing the rapidly advancing Soviet forces. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)



The meagre Finnish defences at the front line at the Subetsa swamp, the sector nearest to Ladoga's eastern shores on the Syväri front. When the Soviet attack hit, the enemy infantry was able to run over the barbed-wire obstacles. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

command, II Army Corps, was given to Einar Mäkinen. On the Maaselkä Isthmus, Mäkinen had been left Fagernäs' 1st Division as well as the 21st Brigade. He was soon also to receive the Äänisjärvi Coastal Brigade, which had been guarding the shores of its namesake lake.

The development of the Soviet offensive on the Karelian Isthmus forced Mannerheim to conclude that in order to free more troops for that main front, he would now have to relinquish the whole of eastern Karelia. On 17 June, Aunus Group and II Army Corps started a methodical fighting retreat towards the former border. They were to give battle with minimum forces whilst conserving their men. The troops were explicitly forbidden from destroying anything of value, apart from the most vital military targets, during their withdrawal.

Meretskov's Karelian Front controlled the operations against both the Syväri and Maaselkä lines of defence. During the previous winter the Soviet

formations in the Aunus sector had been weakened by the removal of two divisions which had been converted into fortification troops. Then, during the spring thaw, Krutikov's Seventh Army on the Syväri front was again reinforced strongly. By the summer of 1944, Krutikov had at his disposal nearly 143,000 men. These troops were divided up as follows in the centre of his attack, from east to west: Engineer Captain Simon Gudimov's 3rd Naval Rifle Brigade, Major-General Peter Gnedin's 4th Rifle Corps, Lieutenant-General Paul Mironov's 37th Guards Rifle Corps, and Major-General Simon Mikulski's 99th Rifle Corps. The far end of the line near Osta was left to Colonel Basil Sopenkov's 368th Rifle Division. Shortly after the attack commenced, Seventh Army's reserves were reduced by 20,000 men as the 94th Rifle Crops was diverted to the Leningrad Front, leaving Krutikov with only the 70th Naval Rifle Brigade and some of the troops in his two coastal forts.

On the Maaselkä front, Gorelenko's Thirty-Second Army wielded over 32,000 men. Of the army's four divisions, the 27th Rifle Division was deployed north in the Rukajärvi area where it faced Raappana's 14th Division. That still left Gorelenko with Colonel Basil Zolotaryov's 176th Rifle Division, Major-General Nicholas Tsernuha's 289th Rifle Division and Colonel Nikifor Tsygangov's 313th Rifle Division.

Both the Seventh and Thirty-Second armies were supported by hundreds of planes from the Seventh Air Army, led by Lieutenant-General Ivan Sokolov. The main goal of Meretskov's Karelian Front was to breach the Finnish lines at Syväri or Maaselkä and then loop around the northern edge of Lake Ladoga into the rear of the Finnish defences on the Karelian Isthmus (see map on p.262).

RETREAT TO THE PISI–SAARIMÄKI–SAMMATUS (PSS) LINE

The first prepared line of defence in depth in the direction of Aunus was the PSS Line. These defensive fortifications were planned to run through Pisi–Saarimäki–Sammatus, but had only partially been constructed. The main attention of the fortification troops had so far been focused on the rearmost U Line, running from Pitkäranta to Loimola. On 19 June, as the first stage of the withdrawals, the Finns abandoned the last of their bridgehead positions on the southern side of the Syväri River. The Soviets chose not to harass these manoeuvres; Talvela expected to receive their onslaught from positions on the north side of the river. The following is an extract from Talvela's diary entry on this day:

> My dog Tarja woke me in her usual way by starting to chew on my bedframe at 05:30. As no one had woken me by now, I assumed that this night too

> had been our victory [i.e. the lines had held for another day] … Around 08:00 Nordgren [Colonel Johan Nordgren was the chief of staff for VI Corps] informed me that on the right flank of the 8th Division the Soviets had shelled fiercely and attacked our abandoned positions. Also Isakson advised me that everything had gone according to plan, all our forces were now safely north of the Syväri … Then the enemy had launched an airstrike against Pidma Bridge, five minutes before we would have blown it up in any case. Unfortunately three of our own guards had been setting the last charges when the premature detonation took place. (Talvela, 1977)

The Soviet attack across the Syväri started on 21 June. This operation was supported by 750 planes and massed artillery. The main focus was in the direction of Lotinanpelto and the Aunus road, where they soon managed to secure a foothold on the northern shore. The Finnish artillery was spread thinly across the whole front, which led to insufficient numbers being brought to bear against the spearhead. This prompted Talvela to give orders for Tapola's 5th Division and Colonel August Kuistio's 15th Brigade to hold their ground defending the Syväri–Kuuttilahti line. This order was necessary in order to win time for the withdrawal of the forces further east. Tapola and Kuistio were told to retreat to the PSS Line only in the face of overwhelming enemy forces.

Kääriäinen's 8th Division was to retreat and take up position in the Sammatus–Mäkrijärvi area. Isakson's 7th Division was now to become Mannerheim's private reserve on this front and was ordered to relocate all the way to the north-western end of the PSS Line. In the meantime, the

Finnish sentry watches over no man's land. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

An eight-horse team dragging a 3.5-ton howitzer during the worst of the spring thaw. A few months later these same beasts of burden would be urged to give their utmost so that these men could save their precious artillery from falling to the advancing enemy. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

20th Brigade and 17th Division had received orders on 12 June to transfer to the Karelian Isthmus; three days later the whole of V Army Corps and the 11th Division were similarly relocated. This left Talvela with Blicks' VI Army Corps, which completed the planned manoeuvres by 24 June, despite the ever-increasing Soviet pressure. On the night of 23 June, while the Finns were making the last of these manoeuvres, Lieutenant-Colonel Alexander Blak's 70th Naval Rifle Brigade, escorted by 287 aircraft, made a surprise landing behind the PSS Line. This attack targeted the sector where the road and railway ran next to the shore between the villages of Vitele and Tuulos. Three of the 11th Division's transport trains were trapped in the area, and were rapidly blown up in order to prevent them falling into Soviet hands. The landing effectively cut off the coastal road and railway which were vital for the movement of VI Army Corps.

Containing this breach became critical, lest all of Aunus Group end up surrounded. However, even before the Finnish counter-attack could begin, the Soviet landing area was strengthened by the arrival of a second naval rifle brigade, Gudimov's 3rd. Gunner Heikki Talvela (nephew of Paavo Talvela) recalled how the Soviets cunningly infiltrated the radio frequencies used to coordinate the bombardment of the landing site. Then, by speaking passable Finnish, the Soviets proceeded to give

(1895–1949)

ALEXEY KRUTIKOV
LIEUTENANT-GENERAL
SEVENTH ARMY

Alexey Nikolayevich Krutikov started his career in the Tsarist Army in 1915. After being fast-tracked through Lieutenant School, he rose to command a battalion serving in both the Russian Civil War and World War I.

Between 1938 and 1940, Krutikov was a senior lecturer at the Military Academy. He was appointed commander of Seventh Army on 29 January 1943, and was promoted to lieutenant-general only three months later. In October 1944, he became the chief of staff for the Karelian Front. After the war, Krutikov became the Chief Administrator for the Soviet Military Academy.

contradictory orders and even managed to cause some Finnish guns to fire on friendly units. (H. Talvela, 1990)

At the same time that the Finnish counter-attack against the bridgehead faltered, the PSS Line started to collapse in the Pisi sector. There, Kuistio's 15th Brigade was about to be overwhelmed by the combined attacks of Mironov's 37th Guards Rifle Corps and Gnedin's 4th Rifle Corps. Heikki Talvela recalled the following about the day's events:

> 15:20 the enemy started a preparatory bombardment with their artillery and mortars. Next, the infantry poured forth shouting 'URAAA!' Our barbed-wire obstacles did not seem to slow them down noticeably, they just threw mats made out of twigs or their overcoats on the defences and ran straight over them. Our efforts to defend the Pisi fortifications ended shortly after as the Soviets made a breach between our two battalions and soon threatened to encircle us … Our chaotic escape from Pisi could have cost us the whole brigade unless the troops were brought under control. The road, which was in poor shape to begin with, was now packed with artillery pieces, cars, carriages and individual soldiers milling about. The only thought everybody had was: 'Those who can, save themselves' … Around 7km north of Pisi a string of officers took control and rallied the confused troops. (H. Talvela, 1990)

Despite the fact that the Soviet bridgehead had severed both the road and railway lines to the rear, the landing forces could still be bypassed on the supply roads the Finns had built. This prompted VI Army Corps commander Blick to issue orders to retreat from the PSS Line on the evening of 24 June. By the time Aunus Group commander Talvela heard of this, he had no other option than to accept Blick's decision as the men had already abandoned the defences. On the very same day Talvela had given explicit orders for the positions to be held and further counter-attacks to be prepared. Then, despite a quiet night on his front, Blick had given orders for withdrawal and forbade any of his staff from being in contact with his superiors at Aunus Group. This prompted Talvela to insist on Blick's removal. Mannerheim was extremely displeased with Blick, but could not agree to any changes at this precise time.[8]

On 27 June, Talvela gave orders for Blick's VI Army Corps to retreat to the north side of the landing, setting their defences on the Vitele–Jessoila line. Despite the efforts of the withdrawing Finns, the Soviets

Pioneers planting German-made model 1935 anti-tank mines under a log road near the PSS Line. (Sa-Kuva)

8 Later, on 7 July, Mannerheim demoted Blick to lead the 2nd Division on the Karelian Isthmus and promoted its commander Martola to replace Blick.

(1892–1960)

SELIM ISAKSON
MAJOR-GENERAL
7TH DIVISION

Selim Engelbert Isakson started his military career in the *Pfadfinder* course. During his time in Germany, Isakson took part in the fighting at Riga Bay and the Aa River. When the Finnish Civil War broke out, Isakson returned home and became a captain in the White Guards. Upon the eve of the Winter War, Isakson was given command of the 5th Division on the Karelian Isthmus. His men played a pivotal role in repelling the enemy's breakthrough in the Summa-Lähde sector.

During the Interim Peace and at the beginning of the Continuation War, Isakson served as chief of the Organisation Department at Mannerheim's headquarters. In January 1944, he assumed the front-line command of the 7th Division. In this role, Isakson took part in the battles at the Syväri River and in Ladoga Karelia. Isakson resigned in 1945. Following investigation during the 'Weapons Cache' case, he was acquitted of all charges.

followed immediately in their wake. The fighting retreat concentrated on saving the lives of as many soldiers as possible and therefore large amounts of war materiel had to be abandoned.

Meanwhile on the eastern end of the line, Isakson's 7th Division had completed its retreat to Äänislinna without too much difficulty. By the time it reached the city, the rapid withdrawal along the rest of the isthmus left its right flank dangerously exposed. In order to avoid the 7th Division and the Äänisjärvi Coastal Brigade from becoming isolated, Talvela gave orders for the men to take new defensive positions running from Vieljärvi to Säämäjärvi villages.

Soldiers helping the regimental commander's car forward on the Tuulosjoki road. The main coastal road and railway had been severed by the Red Army and most of the slow moving supply tractors and horses had already been lost. Now the men would have to help the remaining supply columns on their ponderous way along secondary roads of the Aunus Isthmus. (Courtesy of the personal archive of Heikki Talvela)

On the night of 28 June, the Finns abandoned the city of Äänislinna, which soon reverted to its name of Petroskoi.

Heikki Talvela recounts the following story of his escape across open terrain near Alavoinen, where he was suddenly targeted by a flight of enemy aircraft:

> I was lying down in the ground and the skies overhead were full of Soviet ground-attack planes. There were dozens if not hundreds of planes shooting us dead, one man at a time. I remember trying to dig a hole into the ground with my bleeding fingers, so that I could hide my head even a little bit better ... I know this would not have helped much, as the bullets were coming from above. Then one particular pilot took me as his target and kept circling my position again and again, always firing at me. His aircraft had fixed machine guns on both of its wings and when I lay very still, the streaking bullets tore the ground on both sides of me. I remember vividly, when quickly looking over my shoulder, that I could see how that plane dived again, the pilot was clearly visible and fiercely grimacing at me. There it dawned on me that it was my 20th birthday that day and this was where my life was now going to end. But somehow it did not end and if I am still alive I will be turning 90 this summer. (H. Talvela, 2014)

OPPOSITE
Colonel Kotilainen, the commander of 45th Infantry Regiment, going over his plans for receiving the Red Army, near Kuittinen on 25 June 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

THE MAASELKÄ ISTHMUS

After 16 June, when the defences at Maaselkä had been stripped of most of the men and the Finns were preparing a staged withdrawal, the situation remained somewhat confused at the front. The II Army Corps was now only left with the 1st Division and the 21st Brigade; recognising this opportunity, Gorelenko's Thirty-Second Army sent its three divisions into attack. On 20 June they achieved a first breakthrough near Maaselkä station, forcing the Finns to retreat into the narrowest part of the isthmus to a line running from Karhumäki to Seesjärvi. There, for the next two days, the Finns managed to repel all attacks.

On the night of 23 June, despite their heavy losses, the Soviets finally managed to pierce the defences near Karhumäki station. This triggered Mäkinen's II Army Corps to start withdrawing along the main roads towards Porajärvi. Two smaller detachments were sent north-west, while one group turned south along the Murmansk railroad, where their task was to guard the Munjärvi crossroads. The follow-up attack by Thirty-Second Army proceeded so sluggishly and weakly, that II Army Corps was able to pretty much set its own leisurely pace of evacuation. At the end of June the Finnish rearguard was still holding the Maaselkä isthmus near Lake Seesjärvi. The main body of II Army Corps was now south of Paatene village on the western shores of Seesjärvi. The town of Kontupohja on the north-west corner of Lake Ääninen had been lost, but the defenders still held Munjärvi village.

Since Aunus Group was clearly in trouble fighting against such superior forces to the south-west of its positions, II Army Corps was ordered to reinforce the former's flank. On 30 July, command of II Army Corps was handed over to Talvela's Aunus Group and it was decided that Mäkinen's forces should concentrate on holding the line Lintujärvi–Jänkäjärvi–Sotjärvi. If these positions had to be relinquished, the men were to take advantage of the virgin forests and wilderness, using guerrilla tactics in order to continue relentless defensive operations. At the same time the Ääninen Coastal Brigade, which was withdrawing from Petroskoi, was also placed under Mäkinen's command. They were to strengthen the juncture of the two Finnish forces near Jessoila (see map on p.262).

Mannerheim gave orders for Aunus Group to establish a holding line running Rajakontu–Vieljärvi–Säämäjärvi. Meanwhile, Mäkinen's II Army Corps was to continue guarding the lake narrows further north. As the Soviet pressure at the seam of these two formations increased, Mannerheim sent troops from Fägernäs' 1st Division to the area. Their goal was to help in the Lake Säämäjärvi area. By now it had become obvious that due to the

superiority of Soviet forces, creating a unified front that could hold in all sectors would not be possible without a withdrawal to the U Line in the rear.

These unprepared holding positions were first breached near the shores of Lake Ladoga, and soon the Finns were again forced to retreat. By 6 July, the Soviet spearhead had already captured Salmi village and crossed the Tulemajoki River. It was Stalin's turn to celebrate a successful, rapid advance; the number of artillery pieces his troops had captured was estimated at 933, along with 18,000 shells. Many of the guns had been speedily spiked, and the retreating Finns had blown up the larger ammunition stores.

Meanwhile, the retreat was proceeding at a more orderly pace for Mäkinen's II Army Corps. The Lintujärvi–Jänkäjärvi line was reached with few losses on 5 July, but the continued withdrawal of the rest of Aunus Group forced Mäkinen to head back towards the former national borders. From a strategic point of view, attacking across the dense forests in the area was simply not an option for the heavily motorised Soviet forces. This allowed II Army Corps to concentrate its defensive efforts on the few, key crossroads that the Red Army could use. Despite this knowledge, the Finns were still outnumbered by nearly 4:1. Against the enemy's concentrated formations, II Army Corps was able to bring to bear the combined support of 13 artillery batteries. Slowly, the Soviet machine had started to run out of steam.

Using the two main roads, Seventh Army focused three army corps and a total of 23,000 men on a 30km front between the coast and Lake Tulemajärvi. The attack was spearheaded by Major-General Gregory Golovano's 127th Light Rifle Corps (led by Major-General Zinovy Alexejev from 13 July, when Golovano was wounded), with Gnedin's 4th Rifle Corps attacking in the direction of Pitkäranta and Mironov's 37th Guards Rifle Corps operating on the critical right flank.

On the coastal road, the two defending Finnish units (Tapola's 5th and Kääriäinen's 8th divisions) faced crushing enemy numbers, while Mikulski's 99th Rifle Corps attacked from the Kolla River towards Loimola. The former battleground at Loimola was being defended by Isakson's 7th Division. With the desperate battles along the Karelian Isthmus raging, there were no reserves left for the defence of Ladoga Karelia. Moreover, as the retreat continued, men had to be taken from the front and sent to prepare the last defensive positions at the U Line. Now the Finns' only goal was to wear down the enemy as much as they could before settling into this fortified position running from Koirinoja to Loimola. The defence of the part of the line towards Tolvajärvi and Möhkö would have to rely on the natural features of the lake narrows.

Retreat to the U-Line

THE U LINE

The final defensive positions running from Pitkäranta to Loimola were the known as the U Line. In contrast to the rest of the Finnish defensive positions, the U Line was named after its architect Major Yrjö Urto. Although Urto supervised the construction, he had neither the time nor the resources to see the works through to completion. As the fortification teams had been concentrating on the southern edge near Ladoga, and the northern side towards Loimola had been left devoid of any concrete bunkers. However, barbed-wire obstacles at least ran the length of the line.

On 7 July, Talvela ordered a withdrawal to the U Line. He tasked Kuistio's 15th Brigade with remaining forward of the main positions and fighting a rearguard action, while the rest of the army's forces disengaged. In the end both the 5th and 7th divisions were also forced to take part in these holding actions; all the forces finally reached the defences on 10 July. The Soviet armoured forces that had followed on the heels of the retreating Finns were stopped with a concentrated artillery barrage. On the Lemetti road, salvoes from 11 batteries destroyed seven tanks of the attacking 24, and damaged many more. This provided a great boost to the defenders' morale. The Soviet attack had been stopped along the line, although in 7th Division's sector near Loimola village, the 99th Rifle Corps managed to occupy some of the forward emplacements. These positions could not be recaptured.

On 11 July, the Red Army concentrated its attack on the Nietjärvi sector, which was defended by Tapola's 5th Division. There the Soviets managed to capture the outlying positions along a kilometre-long stretch of the U Line. During the following day, the attack swelled from Nietjärvi to the shores of

(1895–1971)

KUSTAA TAPOLA
MAJOR-GENERAL
5TH DIVISION

Kustaa Anders Tapola acted as chief of staff for the Army of the Isthmus during the Winter War. When the Continuation War started, Tapola first acted as the chief of staff for the Karelian Army, and when it was disbanded he transferred to the same role in the newly formed Aunus Group. On 14 May 1942, Tapola was transferred to command the 5th Division. He remained in this role until the truce with the Soviet Union, at which point Tapola became the acting commander of VI Army Corps.

Tapola was made a knight of the Mannerheim Cross on 18 November 1944. The commendation for this high honour read:

> Tapola led his 5th Division throughout its hardest battles, where it had to endure the strongest pressure and the hardest blows the enemy struck against Aunus Group. Thanks to his skilled leadership, the division continued, through tenacious fighting, to cause the enemy significant losses. It finally halted the enemy attempts at breakthrough at Pitkäranta after several days of battle, despite the opposition's great strength. In the process it caused the enemy tremendous losses, and thus stabilised the front in the most critical sector of Ladoga Karelia until the end of the war.

Tapola was appointed general of the infantry in 1951 and retired in 1955.

Lake Ladoga, but along the line the meagre Finnish forces held. With the support of nearly ten batteries, they managed to contain the breach. While the fighting lessened elsewhere, it still raged fiercely at Nietjärvi. There, the Finns kept trying to recapture the lost trenches metre by metre, with sub-machine guns, grenades and flamethrowers. The men of the Red Army, although tired, would not give in, fighting to the last man.

An extract from Talvela's diary from 13 July 1944 recalls:

> Isakson told me at 08:25 that in his sector, there had been only minor clashes with the enemy. The liquidation of the enemy unit circling Lake Saarijärvi had just got underway. The dent in the U Line, in the direction of the Saarijärvi road, had been more or less ironed out. We have evidence of 500 [Soviet] dead, but one captured soldier had informed us that another 150 were still in the *motti*; these men have decided to fight to the death. After this report I went over the situation with [Quartermaster General Aksel] Airo and agreed that Aarnio's [51st Infantry] Regiment will remain on our left flank, where it can in time re-join its own division [the 1st]. Airo promised the support of bombers, but no fighter planes were available for us. On the Karelian Isthmus the Soviets are still butting their head against Vuosalmi. (Talvela, 1977)

The Red Army's second breakthrough attempt in the Nietjärvi sector started on 15 July. In the two-day battle that ensued, the attacking Soviet division was partially surrounded and suffered 2,000 casualties before fleeing. This loss seems to have becalmed the southern side of the U Line, as the enemy's focus now switched back to the Loimola area.

Even in the better-prepared parts of the hastily prepared U Line, the defences were sometimes no more than what the individual soldiers managed to dig themselves. Here one apprehensive defender awaits the end of yet another Soviet bombardment at Nietjärvi on 21 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Signal troops of the 3rd Battalion of the 44th Infantry Regiment in their dugout as Soviet ground-attack planes strike, at Nietjärvi on 22 July 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

At this time, II Army Corps' northern neighbours, the Finnish 14th Division, had sent the reinforced 7th Independent Battalion to hold the isthmus of Klyyssinvaara on its southern flank. This helped to contain the front, but left Ekman's 21st Brigade at Porajärvi to face a most severe attack from the Soviet 176th and 289th Rifle divisions. By 13 July, the brigade had to surrender the village and settled to the west of it to receive the next enemy attack. They did not have to wait long, as on 16 July, the Soviet attack continued. This time the 21st Brigade had to retreat nearly 40km to the Kuolismaa area.

By 18 July, the majority of Aunus Group' forces had been withdrawn to the Karelian Isthmus and the army group was officially disbanded. The front had been stabilised and the overall responsibility for Ladoga Karelia was transferred to Martola, the commander of VI Army Corps. Talvela was first recalled to army headquarters in Mikkeli, where he received personal instructions from Mannerheim to once again travel to Berlin. From Hitler's headquarters, Talvela was able to advise his commander-in-chief on the dire situation the German forces were facing, and of what was to follow. On the Eastern Front the Soviet onslaught proceeded apace, and the supply roads of the German Army Group North were about to be cut. In France, the Allies had achieved a dangerous breakthrough.

THE NORTHERN U LINE: VICTORY AT ILOMANTSI

By 26 July, Tsernuha's 289th Rifle Division had captured the important Kuilismaa village crossroads, while the vanguard of Zolotaryov's 176th Rifle Division, advancing on their right flank, had edged past the former national borders. Once II Army Corps reached the U Line, Mäkinen's men were to take over the defences on the northern flank from Loimola village towards Porajärvi village. The realisation that a single regiment could not possibly hold back two full Soviet divisions had prompted the Finnish headquarters to act. A newly formed emergency stop-gap force, Group R, under the command of Major-General Erkki Raappana, took control of the front.

While the fighting at the southern end of the U Line petered out during the latter half of July, Gorelenko's Thirty-Second Army kept hammering away at II Army Corps' positions.

The Seventh Army, in the south, transferred its 127th Light Rifle Corps to help at Loimola. Having arrived, the 127th began its attack on the night of 17 July, north-west of Lake Loimolanjärvi. Svensson gave immediate orders for his 7th Division to counter-attack. On 23 July, after several days of fighting, Svensson was forced to cease these efforts and settle for the area his men still held. Soviet attempts to break through Loimola village to the rear of the U Line had not succeeded either, and in the process Golovano's 127th Light Rifle Corps lost over 2,200 men. By the beginning of August, both forces in the Loimola area settled for trench warfare.

To the north, in the direction of Suojärvi, Fagernäs' 1st Division was forced to perform a fighting retreat, reaching Tolvajärvi by 17 July. On 25 July, the division was

(1893–1962)

ERKKI RAAPPANA
MAJOR-GENERAL
14TH INFANTRY DIVISION

Jäger Erkki Johannes Raappana served in many of the battles of the Finnish Civil War. In August 1921, Raappana became the commander of the Joensuu Border Guards. He was made a major in 1925, and promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel in 1928. When the Winter War began on 30 November 1939, Raappana cunningly withdrew his two battalions from the border deep into the forests. Once the Soviets had attacked the abandoned Finnish positions, Raappana sent his men into a flanking manoeuvre. This so unnerved the enemy commander that the Soviets had already withdrawn back over the border by the end of the year.

When Raappana first met Soviet tanks, he had his men make petrol bombs from tar and petrol, later dubbed Molotov Cocktails. When the Continuation War started, Raappana became the commander of the 14th Division. This unit acted independently in the borderlands between Finnish and German control reporting directly to Mannerheim throughout the war. Soon after the Omelia *motti* battles, Raappana was made the third Knight of the Mannerheim Cross. He was then promoted to major-general on New Year's Eve 1941.

In July 1944, Raappana transferred to Ilomantsi to form Group Raappana. His mission was to deal with the two Soviet divisions that were still advancing and had made their way to the former border. In the *motti* battles that followed, Group Raappana caused significant losses to the Soviet forces. This was a great boost to the Finns' morale, since both the Karelian Isthmus and the city of Aunus had been lost. After the war the Allied Control Commission insisted that Raappana retire early from the Finnish Armed Forces.

reinforced with the Border Guard Brigade, and dug in for defence at the Lake Tolvajärvi narrows. Tsygangov's 313th Rifle and Sopenkov's 368th Rifle divisions, which led the attack, obviously did not want to repeat the losses the Red Army had incurred in this same area during the Winter War; instead, they joined forces in order to encircle the Finns from the north. Colonel Valdemar Sora's 20th Brigade, which Mannerheim had sent from the Karelian Isthmus, made a timely arrival and proceeded to halt the 313th Rifle Division north of Tolvajärvi. Meanwhile, the Border Guard Brigade and elements of Fagernäs' 1st Division stopped the 368th Rifle Division in their sector. By 4 August, the fighting in this area had also simmered down into trench warfare.

In the early days of August, the last significant battle of the Continuation War was fought in the Ilomantsi area. The Soviets had crossed the former national borders, and were threatening the town of Ilomantsi. Group R, which consisted of elements of Raappana's own 14th Division, the 21st Infantry Brigade, a border guard brigade and the recently transferred Cavalry Brigade from the Karelian Isthmus, was tasked with halting the advance of the Soviet 176th and 289th Rifle divisions.

Raappana was the ideal man for the job, as he knew the terrain like the back of his hand. He first allowed the 289th Rifle Division to proceed along the Ilomantsi road until they were stretched along the narrows between Lake Sysmäjärvi and the smaller Lake Konnukkajärvi just east of the former. There, at the end of July, Tsernuha's 289th Rifle Division was checked and stopped. Now Raappana switched to the offensive, cutting the Soviets' supply lines. The second formation, Zolotaryov's 176th Rifle Division, was then surrounded by cutting their only meaningful escape route to the north. This was performed by two battalions in a task force commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Väinö Partinen. By 2 August,

(1895–1964)

EINAR MÄKINEN

MAJOR-GENERAL
II ARMY CORPS

Einar Nikolai Mäkinen's baptism of fire was at the Misse River on the German Eastern Front in 1916. Whilst fighting in the Finnish Civil War, he commanded a company for the White Guards. During the Winter War, Mäkinen worked in the headquarters department for organisation and training. At the onset of the Continuation War, he first took over the running of the organisation department, and later the department of training. About a month into the conflict, when I Army Corps was established, Mäkinen was made its commander.

Mäkinen led I Army Corps through the Finnish attack phase in Ladoga Karelia and the eastern Karelian Isthmus. In 1942, Mäkinen took command of V Army Corps, leading its men in the fighting on the Aunus Isthmus. In 1943, Mäkinen departed the front line to take over the National Labour Office at the Ministry of Transport.

In 1944, Mäkinen was recalled to lead II Army Corps against the Soviet onslaught. His troops took part in the battles in eastern Karelia.

Mäkinen was promoted to lieutenant-general in 1945, and resigned from the temporary position of quartermaster general a year later. Subsequently, Mäkinen spent 12 months in detention as a result of the 'Weapons Cache' case. All charges were eventually dropped.

Major-General Raappana demonstrating the use of a Panzerfaust to his officers in the Rukajärvi area. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

both enemy divisions were in a *motti* and the Finns could begin their organised destruction. This prompted the Karelian Front commander Meretskov to send in the 3rd, 69th and 70th Naval Rifle brigades to clear the area of 'small sabotage parties which have cut the division's supply routes', as he himself put it. The relief, however, did not arrive in time. By 9 August, the majority of the entrapped Soviet troops had managed to escape the loose encirclements, albeit at a high price; the spearhead and the would-be-rescuers both lost a significant amount of

men and materiel, including 94 artillery pieces, six rocket batteries and over 3,000 dead.

Having been forced to give up the Karelian Isthmus, Viipuri and Aunus, this victory was a great boost to Finnish morale, showing that their troops could still fight back. The Soviets now gave up any attempts on Ilomantsi and settled in for trench warfare in this sector. In the north, the bulk of Raappana's 14th Division was able to hold its ground in the Rukajärvi area until the end of the war.

CHAPTER 12

ARMISTICE AND THE INTERIM PEACE

By the end of summer 1944, Finland's armed forces were stronger and better equipped than ever before. The Soviet main offensive had been withstood, and a decisive defensive victory at Tali–Ihantala had been won. Everywhere the defences now held. Stalin was already keen to pull his forces out for the race to Berlin, and from a purely military standpoint it was not immediately necessary for the Finns to succumb to all the harsh peace terms.

However, as the withdrawal of German forces continued along the Eastern Front, Finland was again in danger of ending up fighting the Red Army alone. Hence, all efforts converged on finding a way to sign a separate peace treaty and end the war. However, fulfilling the demands that Germany and the Soviet Union had each placed on Finland proved very problematic.

A Finnish peace delegation carrying a white flag greets Soviet officers in no man's land on 7 September 1944. 'The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics won, but small and determined Finland managed to finish a good second,' quipped to Rifleman Vanhala, a fictitious soldier in Väinö Linna's book *Tuntematon Sotilas*. (Sa-Kuva)

President Risto Ryti and the commander of the 5th Infantry Regiment, Colonel Aladar Paasonen, in Helsinki on 5 July 1941. Paasonen was the commander of the Finnish headquarters Intelligence Office from 1942 to 1944. After the wars, he was recruited by the American and French intelligence services. (Sa-Kuva)

There were two issues with Finland abandoning its co-belligerent Germany: Finland's heavy reliance on grain and weapons shipments, and, more importantly, the presence of the well-equipped Twentieth Mountain Army which still had around 214,000 men in Lapland. Because of these concerns the Germans would have to be handled very carefully. Once Germany finally fell, the Soviets would have no more need for negotiations. So with time in short supply, the political leadership of Finland started secretly to probe for peace through Soviet Diplomat Alexandra Kollontai in Sweden. (She had also been involved in the talks that ended the Winter War.)

On 27 July 1944, Kollontai told Erik Boheman, the Swedish State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, that the Soviet Union was ready to negotiate. Their first and only demand was that before any talks could commence, Finland needed to enact a change in its government. After a new, more suitable cabinet was elected, the discussions for peace could begin. They were ready to at least guarantee that Finland would remain unoccupied and independent. Following this ultimatum, Risto Ryti resigned from the presidency on 1 August. Earlier in July, Ryti had given personal guarantees to Ribbentrop that Finland would not sue for peace, and would fight to the end together with the Reich. Now that he was no longer president, the peacemakers would be free to proceed once more without being tied to his promises. Prime Minister Edwin Linkomies served as acting president until 4 August, at which point Mannerheim (who had been elected by special statute) was sworn in as Finland's sixth president.

This change of direction prompted Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, chief of the OKW, to visit Finland on 17 August. His goal was to convince Finland of Germany's desire and especially its ability to keep hold of the Baltic countries. Mannerheim bluntly informed Keitel that he felt in no way constrained by the promises made by past presidents and that Finland would continue to fight only as long as its own interests required it to do so.

On 25 August, the Finnish ambassador to Sweden, Georg Gripenberg, handed a letter to Kollontai containing Finland's proposal for an armistice. Four days later, the Soviets answered with their demands. These included, among others, withdrawal to the borders defined in the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty and a further cessation of territory at Petsamo. Finland would also have to immediately and publicly renounce its ties to Germany and evict all Wehrmacht forces by no later than 15 September. Any German troops left in the country after this date were to be disarmed, captured and handed over as prisoners of war to the Allies.

Before making his final decision, President Mannerheim's sense of chivalry compelled him to write the following missive directly to Hitler:

> Our German brothers-in-arms will forever remain in our hearts. The Germans in Finland were certainly not the representatives of foreign despotism but helpers and brothers-in-arms. But even in such cases foreigners are in difficult positions requiring such tact. I can assure you that during the past years nothing whatsoever happened that could have induced us to consider the German troops intruders or oppressors. I believe that the attitude of the German Army in northern Finland towards the local population and authorities will enter our history as a unique example of a correct and cordial relationship … I deem it my duty to lead my people out of the war. I cannot and I will not turn the arms which you have so liberally supplied us against Germans. I harbour the hope that you, even if you disapprove of my attitude, will wish and endeavour like myself and all other Finns to terminate our former relations without increasing the gravity of the situation. (Erfurth, n.d.)

On 2 September, the Finnish parliament held a secret meeting. In this session, the harsh Soviet terms were accepted in principle, and a decision was made to start the official negotiations for an armistice. The Red Army agreed to cease hostilities two days hence. Finnish troops initiated a cease-fire at 07:00 (Finnish time) on 4 September 1944. The Finns obeyed this agreement to the letter, while the frustrated Soviet soldiers continued to fire with all weapons until 08:00 the following day. When the front-line troops tried to contact their enemy across the trenches, they were informed that no cease-fire orders had reached them. Finnish radio-intelligence could easily decipher captured Soviet cables, and these proved that all the troops had been well informed.

The Finnish high command had real cause for concern, as earlier in the summer the Soviet Union had agreed a similar armistice with the Romanians. There, as soon as the Romanian soldiers ceased fighting and came out of their trenches, they were all taken prisoner, and the Soviets completed the conquest of the now undefended country. Because of this precedent, the troops were ordered to remain in their trenches even after the armistice had begun. Even though the Soviets once again assaulted the Finnish lines, the troops were forbidden from returning fire. These provocations and attempts at last-minute score settling were normally repelled by the infantry withdrawing ahead of the oncoming assault, while the Finnish artillery then launched concentrated salvoes at the now empty positions. This prevented the Soviets from taking more lives or capturing the defensive lines, and in the end prevented another 'Romania incident' from taking place.

The Finnish Peace Delegation in an image taken in Helsinki on 6 September 1944: (from left) Minister Hynninen, General Wahlen, Vuorineuvos (Councillor of State) Grönholm, Minister Hackzell, Dr Castren, General Heinrichs, Major Enckell (Mannerheim's adjutant) and Lieutenant-General Enckell. (Sa-Kuva)

On 7 September, the Finnish delegation led by Foreign Minister Carl Enckell (in place of Prime Minister Antti Hackzell, who had fallen ill) left for Moscow. Due to pressure from the Western Allies, the Soviets were unwilling to make a separate peace agreement, but instead expressed a preference to sign only an interim peace agreement.

On 14 September, the Finnish delegation was surprised by a new set of harsh conditions laid before them. In addition to reinstating the borders of the 1940 Moscow Peace Treaty, the Soviets also insisted on the cessation of the Petsamo Peninsula and the leasing of Porkkala naval base near Helsinki for 50 years. In addition to these demands, Finland was also to pay $300 million in war reparations. The Finnish army had to demobilise within two months, while the Soviet Army was keen to have access to the country, in order to drive off any German forces left in Finland after 15 September – which would have almost certainly led to a full Soviet occupation. A list of people deemed war criminals by the Soviet Union were be arrested and put on trial with the help of the Allies. On 19 September 1944, seeing no other option, the Finnish government accepted all the terms, and signed the Interim Peace Treaty.

OPPOSITE
Finnish soldiers removing the cheval de frise so that the pioneers could start disarming the minefields in front of their lines on the Pitkäranta Sector on 19 September 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

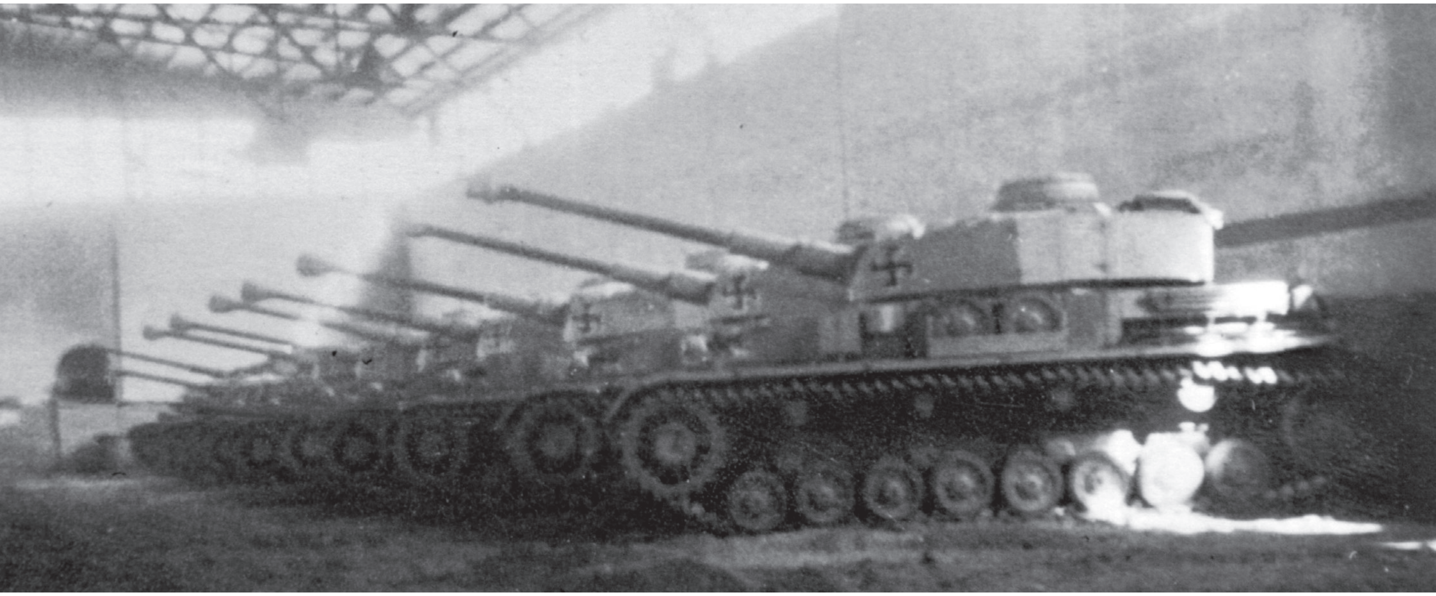
CHAPTER 13

THE LAPLAND WAR, 1944–45

On 2 September 1944, following the terms of the armistice with the Soviet Union, the Finnish Foreign Minister Carl Enckell notified the German ambassador Wipert von Blücher that all ties between the two nations could now be considered severed. At the same time, Enckell demanded that Germany withdraw all of its troops from Finland by 15 September at the latest. It was clear to both parties from the outset that this could never be completed within the two-week deadline. There simply was no way of extracting the 210,000 men of the Twentieth Mountain Army within the nominated timescale.

The Twentieth Mountain Army consisted of nine full divisions. Four of these were elite *Gebirgsjäger* (mountain infantry). After the deadline had passed, the Finns would be obliged to use force to drive out any remaining Germans. This would most likely lead to war between the

A Finnish soldier and reindeer on the Lapland Front. On 22 September, Mannerheim's daily orders concerning the end of the war against the Soviet Union were made public: 'Soldiers of Finland! The war that our nation was forced into three years ago, and which demanded the harshest of sacrifices, has now ended on 19 September with an armistice agreement. After learning our bitter lessons, we now realise that the cornerstone of our life must be establishing permanent trusting relations with all our neighbours … My soldiers! Difficult times are yet ahead of us. We have signed the armistice and now must fulfil its conditions. The situation in Lapland still needs to be resolved, and our troops must still show the same conviction and resolution that they have demonstrated throughout the war'. (Halsti, 1957) (Sa-Kuva)



A new shipment of the potent PzKpfw IV Ausf. J tanks arrives in Finland. Hitler had withheld access to the most modern war machines from his Finnish allies for so long that by the time these tanks arrived, they were to only see action against their makers. In the entire war, Germany would produce a mere 1,354 Tiger I and 5,976 Panther tanks. In contrast, already by 1943 the Soviets were turning out over 1,200 T-34s a month. (Merridale, 2005) (The Parola Armour Museum)

two former allies, which was undoubtedly part of the Soviet plan. Practically all of the German forces were stationed in Lapland and northern Finland. In the south their presence was limited to some administrative offices, supply buildings and storage depots.

Evicting the Germans would not be easy. They had complete air superiority, and in any case part of the armistice agreement limited the use of the Finnish Air Force. Moreover, the autumn rain and cold weather were just about to set in, and there were few roads in the north. When the armistice had been signed, practically all Finnish forces were still on the battlefields just north or west of Lake Ladoga. Moving the men and their equipment north would strain the already stretched transport network beyond its limits.

Following the armistice the Germans launched Operation *Birke* (*Birch*). This contingency plan had already been drawn up in 1943, and was to be invoked in case of a political or military collapse of Finland. In broad terms, it meant the Germans were to fall back into prepared fortifications across Lapland in order to secure the essential supply of nickel ore from the Petsamo region. Nickel was a critical ingredient for making stainless steel and therefore a key material for Germany's war effort. By 1943, as much as 73 per cent of Germany's total demand for nickel was supplied from Petsamo, and by the autumn of the same year this had climbed to almost 90 per cent. The peace terms meant the Soviets would now annex this strategically important area. Apart from the fact that the enemy was now Finland rather than the Soviet Union, Operation *Birke* was to be followed almost to its original letter.

At the end of Continuation War, the Twentieth Mountain Army held over 700km of the front line. Following Dietl's death in a plane crash in June 1944, Colonel-General Lothar Rendulic had assumed command of all German forces in Finland, with headquarters at Rovaniemi. Under his orders, immediately following the announcement of the armistice, German troops took control of practically all of northern Finland north of the Oulunjoki River. Strong formations with in-depth reserves were stationed near Oulu and Hyrynsalmi.

On 3 September, Mannerheim gave orders for 6th Division (now under the command of Puroma) to transfer to Kajaani and for Kuistio's reinforced 15th Brigade to travel to Liminka. By 9 September, these troops had reached their new stations and preparations had begun for the safe withdrawal of the three Finnish battalions previously transferred to the Germans. The single-battalion Task Force Pennanen relocated to the town of Kemi to protect and guard key industrial facilities. The rest of the Finns joined their compatriots in the south.

Before the Lapland War, some 12,000 people had already been evacuated from the northernmost districts due to the threat posed by Soviet partisans. In addition, on 7 September, President Mannerheim's orders regarding the evacuation of all civilians from the area controlled by the Germans were announced. Accordingly, before the landing in Tornio on 1 October, some 127,000 people had already been evacuated. Most of these refugees settled on the Finnish west coast. However, when this attack began, practically none of the civilians in Tornio or Kemi had yet left. By 7 October, the pressure to settle these people in new territory had grown so great that Mannerheim was forced to approach Sweden and ask for their help. Southern Finland had already had to accept some 400,000 evacuees from Karelia, and now a further 100,000 people from Lapland were looking for a place to call home. It took only a couple of hours for the Swedes to give a positive answer. Eventually over 56,000 people were to trek over the western border to live in hastily established refugee camps.

(1887–1971)

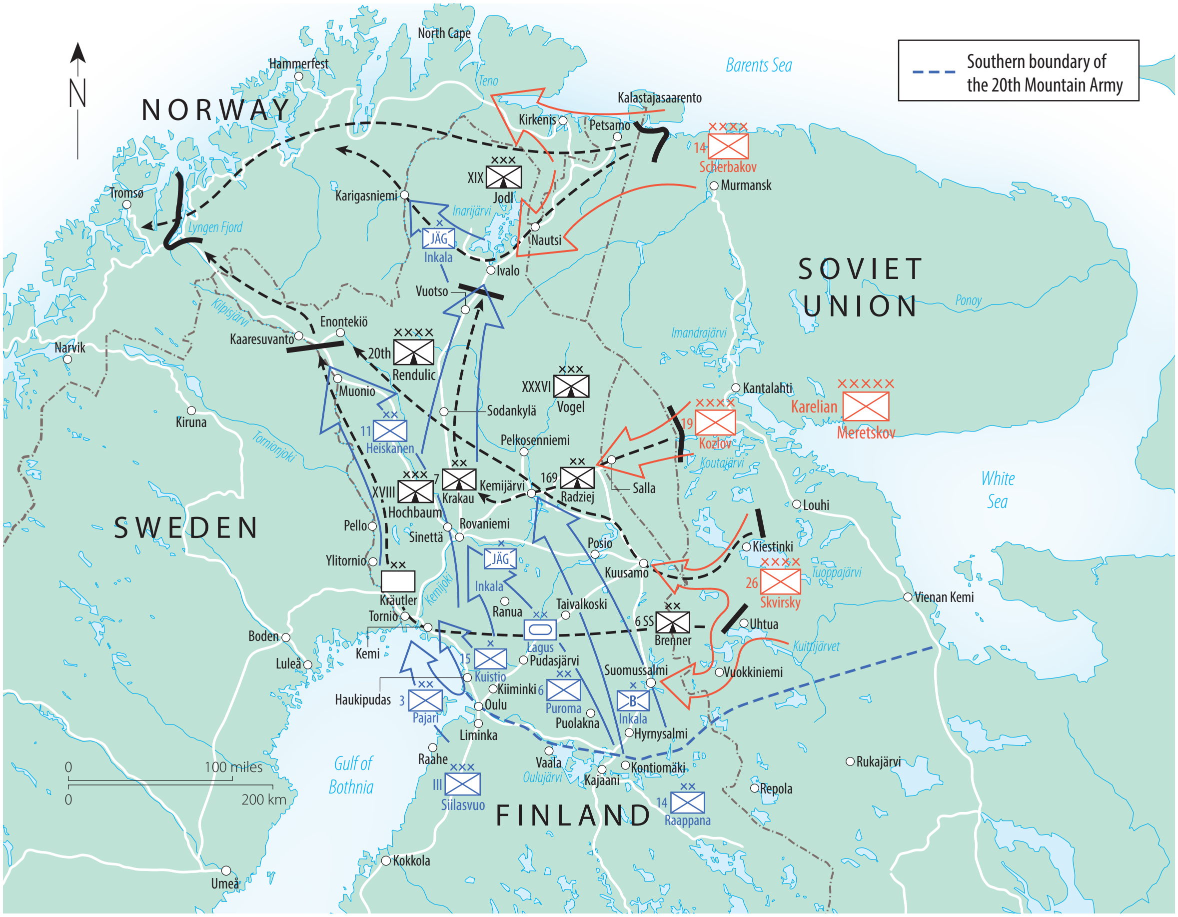
DR LOTHAR RENDULIC

COLONEL-GENERAL
TWENTIETH MOUNTAIN ARMY

With family ties to Croatia, Doctor of Law Rendulic was one of three Austrians to rise to the rank of *Generaloberst* (colonel-general). Rendulic started his military career as a commissioned lieutenant in the Austro-Hungarian Army. He served in the German ranks from the very first day of the Austrian annexation. Between 1943 and 1944, Rendulic led the 2nd Panzer Army in Yugoslavia.

Following Eduard Dietl's demise in a plane crash, Rendulic was given the command of the Twentieth Mountain Army on the Lapland front. During the Lapland War, he gave the infamous orders for the retreating Germans to carry out systematic destruction of all buildings and facilities in the area. He was later acquitted of this atrocity at the Nuremberg trials of 1948. However, the same court saw him imprisoned for the killing of hostages in Yugoslavia. After his release from prison, Rendulic became an author.

The Lapland War



THE 'PHONEY WAR'

The Finns were afraid that the armistice negotiations with the Soviet Union would lead to war against the Axis. In the case of conflict, Lapland would then most likely be devastated by the Germans stationed there. For the Finns it was especially important to preserve the population centres of the north, while the Germans merely wished to withdraw to Norway with as few casualties as possible. In October, the need for these men to relocate was further emphasised when the Soviets launched an offensive on the Petsamo front. The Germans rightly feared that their whole army could be left trapped between the Soviets swinging in from the north and the Finns advancing from the south. It is safe to say that neither Finland nor Germany saw any benefit in fighting one another, yet somehow the Soviet demands still had to be met. On 11 September, trusting this conclusion, Lieutenant-

Colonel Usko Haahti was sent to meet with Lieutenant-General Hermann Hölter, the chief of staff of Twentieth Mountain Army. Haahti's goal was to negotiate a peaceful withdrawal of the Germans and to defuse any conflict while preserving as many Finnish lives and as much property as possible.

The first item on the list to be agreed was the location of the front between the two armies. Haahti tried to reach an understanding where the city of Oulu would be left in Finnish hands without fighting. Oulu currently held the largest German garrison in Finland but it was also the largest population centre in the north. Unbeknownst to the Finns, orders had arrived from Berlin that the Germans were to destroy all their war materiel in the south and then proceed north following a scorched-earth policy across all of Lapland. In order to remain within the parameters of these secret orders, Hölter insisted that the Germans be allowed to destroy all infrastructure and materials on their side of the front, in particular all bridges.

(1909–1978)

USKO HAAHTI
LIEUTENANT-COLONEL
SECRET AGENT

Usko Sakari Haahti served under General Airo of the Finnish headquarters. He was sent on several clandestine missions, the most important being the secret negotiations with the Germans for the establishment of the 'Phoney War'. Thanks to his efforts, hostilities did not begin for several weeks, thus sparing the city of Oulu from destruction. Together with Colonel Valo Nihtilä, Haahti headed the 'Weapons Cache' operations from the autumn of 1944 onwards. On 9 April 1948, both men were dismissed from service and sentenced to five years of hard labour for masterminding the operation. The Finnish High Court subsequently increased Haahti's sentence to six years. After his release from prison, Haahti worked in insurance.

The first of the brand-new PzKpfw IV Ausf. J tanks approaches Oulu in October 1944. The vertical surfaces have been already coated at the factory with the *Zimmer* anti-magnetic mine treatment. (The Parola Armour Museum)

The Allied Control Commission arriving in Helsinki on 23 September 1944. The commission and its leadership was heavily stacked with Stalin's minions, and so quite naturally looked at every matter from a distinctly Soviet viewpoint. (Sa-Kuva)

After spending over three years in the Arctic in Lapland, the troops had become accustomed to sparse living. Despite the relatively good road connections to the naval bases on the Norwegian coast, the army had striven to become as self-sufficient as possible. It had gathered large stockpiles, especially of food, which were not to be left behind. With only limited means of transport available to the Germans, the use of railways and rolling stock soon became one of the key questions. It did not take the Germans long to turn to the Finns for help in this matter. In return for helping with rail transport, the Finns insisted that expensive infrastructure, such as the airfields still in German hands in the south of Finland, were to be left intact.

After two days of intense negotiations a clandestine agreement was reached. The plan was to avoid starting any hostilities whatsoever between the two nations. However, it was vital that any foreign powers observing should think that an actual war was being fought. According to the plan, the Germans would let the Finns know their schedule of withdrawal, and the Finns would then in turn take over the abandoned positions without any bloodshed. This would hopefully fool the Allies into thinking that Finland was actually fighting and actively fulfilling the eviction conditions set by the Soviets. The 'Phoney War' had been conceived.

Lieutenant-General Airo of Finnish Army Headquarters thought that this pact of mutual non-aggression so resembled peacetime military exercises that he called it the 'Autumn Manoeuvres'. The name stuck.

A railway bridge blown up by the Germans. The Finns would have looked on, as per their agreement, as the men of the retreating mountain corps demolished most of the infrastructure. At the heart of the 'Phoney War' compromise was the agreement that despite the German headquarters calling for a complete scorched-earth policy, the troops on the ground had agreed to spare the population centres in return for an orderly and peaceful retreat. (The Parola Armour Museum)

Initially this cat and mouse game worked. As long as both sides kept each other informed of their schedules and ensured that sufficient space was left between the two forces, no firefight would ensue. As agreed, the Germans did destroy bridges, ferries and roads behind them. Often the Finns watched calmly as such acts were carried out. In practice, the pact and the Autumn Manoeuvres only lasted for two weeks, from 14 September until the Finns landed behind the German lines in Tornio on 1 October. Thanks to this agreement, practically no lives were lost during the first few weeks of the war and the city of Oulu survived intact. However, on 15 September a German provocation in the Gulf of Finland was about to bring the whole 'Phoney War' to an abrupt end.

THE ATTACK ON SUURSAARI ISLAND

As stated in the armistice conditions with the Soviet Union, all German troops had to leave Finland by midnight on 15 September 1944. This included the soldiers garrisoned on Suursaari Island. From the German point of view, even if Finland was not going to continue the war, surrendering this base was unacceptable. Suursaari still had strategic importance in maintaining the mine blockade confining the Baltic Fleet. The Soviet Navy had to remain contained, as supply by road became more and more difficult for Army Group North. This seaboard was also the last safe area left in which the German Navy could train its fresh submariners, who were desperately needed for the battle in the Atlantic. Both the island and the Estonian coastline would have to remain in German hands so that the minefields could still be effectively guarded. The point about holding Suursaari soon became irrelevant as on 17 September Hitler gave Army Group North permission to retreat from Estonia at any time after that date.

After the armistice, the mood in the island garrisons was one of relief. War would soon be over for good and everybody could return home. Although

OPPOSITE
Mountains of personal belongings at Rovaniemi station on 17 September 1944. In total 168,000 civilians, roughly 75 per cent of the total population of Lapland, were evacuated. In addition to these refugees, their cattle and domestic animals were also relocated. Every transport hub north of Oulu, the centre of northern Finland, was filled to bursting point as this mass exodus of people and livestock gave rise to a vast need for all types of vehicles. All the roads remained in German hands, and were completely gridlocked with their own troops retreating to the north. Although the Germans did not harass any of the civilian evacuations, they logically prioritised their own military transports. (Sa-Kuva)

German sailors signalling during a naval parade. (Sa-Kuva)

the Finnish commander had been forewarned on 3 September to keep an eye on the Germans, no conflict with them was expected. Thus, the Finns ceased all fortification works and evacuated the convict workforce and some 200 Finns who had been performing their compulsory labour service. Removal of the heavy artillery batteries had also started. On 4 September, German forces demolished their own fortifications and withdrew their radar station and its crew, only to have a total of 26 German radio operators, led by their liaison officer, to return the following day. At the same time, they politely asked for the Finnish liaison officer to leave neighbouring Tytärsaari Island, as this base was to still remain in German hands.

The Finnish high command was concerned about the slow progress of the final part of the peace negotiations with the Soviets, and was therefore not in a great hurry to complete the evacuation process. Thus, even though some men and equipment started to leave the island, those Finnish troops left behind were placed on higher and higher states of alert. On 10 September, six 47mm guns and a pioneer squad were shipped back to reinforce the island against any renewed Soviet threat.

In the spring of 1943, the German liaison officer 1st Lieutenant Wilhelm Müller sent a report to the German high command on the quality of the defences on Suursaari Island. His information included the unit deployment maps of all Finnish forces there. These files had been openly shared between the two partners, as the Finns had access to the same material for the German positions at nearby Tytärsaari Island. Furthermore, Müller had toured and photographed all the fortifications and even observed drills run by the Finns. According to his estimate, performing a landing would be extremely difficult during the open water season, while a winter assault over the ice could succeed; however, the three main fortified Finnish positions could be expected to hold out for up to six months.

The view from the gun emplacements of the 5th Light Coastal Anti-Aircraft Battery on Kotokallio Rock. Below can be seen Suurkylä harbour at Suursaari. This image was taken a couple of days after the German attack against the island. (Sa-Kuva)

It seems that even before Müller sent his report, Hitler had commissioned contingency plans should Finland try to leave the war prematurely. He thought it essential that, should this happen, Suursaari Island and the Åland archipelago would need to be captured.

In February 1944, plans, codenamed *Tanne Ost* (*Fir East*) and *Tanne West* (*Fir West*), for such an eventuality were drawn up. In March 1944, as the Soviets increased pressure on the Finns, it seemed that these plans would have to be put into action sooner rather than later. As set out in *Tanne Ost*, a unit of some 2,000 men began immediate practice for the attack, but as the Finnish front had calmed down by early summer, the attack was not implemented. Instead the Germans offered to send a reinforced platoon to help guard Suursaari. This offer was politely refused.

The situation became more acute again on 20 June, when Viipuri was lost and the Soviet onslaught on the Karelian Isthmus seemed unstoppable. In response, all the troops earmarked for both the *Tanne* operations were put on high alert. The responsibility for the missions was temporarily transferred from the Wehrmacht to the Kriegsmarine. A further 800 seamen and the 500th SS Parachute Battalion were brought into the plan. Again these men were set to practise for the assault, only to be given orders to stand down as the Finnish front stabilised after 9 July.

At the beginning of September 1944, just after the armistice between Finland and the Soviet Union had been agreed upon, Müller gave a further update. He included in his report all the progress the Finns had made with the evacuations and changes to the occupying units. Previously the Finns had supplied visiting German officers with aerial reconnaissance photos with gun positions highlighted as well as navigational charts of the archipelago. Armed with all this information the Germans fine-tuned their landing plans.

Preparatory orders were given for the operation to start on 3 September. Such an attack would have great political significance and might alienate Finland once and for all. Hitler therefore wanted to retain the final decision to launch the operation. The following day, he decided to permanently cancel *Tanne West* aimed at Åland, but deemed the capture of Suursaari as still essential. The German high command was further emboldened by a report they received concerning Lieutenant-Colonel Martti Miettinen, the Finnish commander at Suursaari. He seems to have let it be known to a German liaison officer that he would never give permission to fire on his German comrades, not even if ordered to do so. In order to distract the observing Soviets, he might allow some shots to be fired over the German vessels after they made landfall. This information alone might have been the reason why the Germans finally decided to go ahead with the operation. After all, there was a possibility that the

Finns might hand over the island without any fighting. At the same time, naval intelligence presented alarming news: two submarine fleets, including several surface vessels, had just sailed from the ports of Leningrad and Kronstadt.

After several days of contemplation, the OKW gave orders to Vice Admiral Theodor Burchard to begin the attack at 02:00 on 15 September. As the troops originally earmarked for the operation were no longer available, Burchard proposed cancelling the mission. This was not acceptable and he was told to improvise. Burchard was also instructed to see if he could convince Miettinen and his troops to switch over to the German side. The Luftwaffe promised to help transport the assaulting troops' one heavy and two light anti-aircraft batteries. They also agreed to support the actual landing with fighter planes. Furthermore, the 2nd and 3rd Torpedo Boat fleets and the cruiser *Prinz Eugen* changed their course toward the Gulf of Finland.

Planning the landing was now delegated to Captain at Sea Karl-Conrad Mecke. He had originally been tasked with planning *Tanne West* and was not familiar with the plans for *Tanne Ost* at all. Consequently, he had only a couple of days to prepare for the mission, with no troops at his command, nor time to start training any. In addition, Mecke had three totally different scenarios to consider and prepare for:

1. The Finns offer only token resistance or agree to hand over the positions without fighting.
2. The Finns offer heavy resistance.
3. The Soviets have already occupied the island and the landing has to be performed against the Red Army.

According to German war diaries, Burchard and Mecke managed to gather a total of 2,741 men for the operation. These numbers were further bolstered by at least one assault company and a heavy anti-aircraft battery from Tytärsaari Island. The final plan was that Mecke and Corvette Captain Emil Kieffer would land about 15 minutes prior to the attack. They would inform the Finns of their orders to occupy the island. If the Finns did not acquiesce, they would use force to capture the island. All heavy weapons on the island would be taken over by the German Navy, and any Finnish soldiers who wanted to were free to join the German forces. The rest would be allowed to leave peacefully, while the Germans themselves would immediately occupy positions and prepare to fend off the expected oncoming Soviet forces.

Six hours before the scheduled landing, Mecke's task force left Tallinn harbour. Heading due east at this stage of the war must have felt strange to

the men in his fleet of 30 vessels. They had been reassured that this mission was going to just be plain sailing.

By 14 September, Miettinen had only 1,712 men left under his command. Their armament included four field guns, 24 anti-aircraft guns, 14 coastal guns and nine heavy mortars. They were spread around the island and could not be brought to bear together. On the same evening, the Finns received their first warning of Hitler's intentions, as the Kriegsmarine was spotted laying mines in front of Kotka harbour. The official explanation was that this was being done to deter Soviet landings, but the Finns immediately and correctly assumed that the true purpose was to isolate Suursaari Island from the Finnish surface fleet. On receiving this news, Miettinen immediately ordered his men to battle stations, foiling the surprise the Germans were counting on.

From the Finnish point of view, the 26-strong German detachment on the island led by Müller had changed from an embarrassment to a liability. After the deadline of midnight on 15 September, these men would have to be imprisoned and handed over to the Soviets. At first, the Finns tried to gently remind the Germans about this, but as time passed this was done ever more forcefully. For some reason, Müller did not seem to be in a hurry to depart. Eventually, the Finns were reassured that a vessel had been sent to collect the detachment before the midnight deadline. At 22:00, Kieffer attempted a further ruse by radioing the Finns to inform them that they were on their way to collect the men. Half an hour later, the uneasy Finns tried to get the Germans to board two Finnish patrol boats, so that they could be transferred to nearby Tytärsaari Island. At this stage, Müller commenced an exchange of light signals with an unknown vessel out at sea. The Finns now realised that the Kriegsmarine had surrounded the island in the cover of darkness.

Just after midnight, two ships sailed straight into the harbour. Among the first to land from these was Kieffer, carrying a surrender proposal. He ignored repeated commands to halt and boldly walked up the pier. Dozens of guns and searchlights followed his progress. Miettinen met with Kieffer and enquired about the reason for his arrival, and why he had not obeyed the orders to halt. Kieffer in turn let it be known that he was there to negotiate the island's handover. He talked about the lengthy co-belligerence between the nations, and cited Miettinen's own earlier comments that he would be willing to relinquish the island peacefully. Miettinen retorted that he only took orders from his own commander-in-chief, Mannerheim, and that he had 'been given his own orders regarding the island'. This prompted Kieffer to threaten to capture the island with such a strong force that the Finns did not stand a chance. The two men continued their debate for a further 15

A group of soldiers advancing on a steep and rocky island incline. Attacking the well-built Finnish fortifications at Suursaari must have been a daunting task, and as the German planners had rightly foreseen, this could not easily be accomplished without the element of surprise. (Sa-Kuva)

minutes in the privacy of a small beach hut. In the end, Miettinen told the Germans to leave the harbour and that he would repel any attempts to land. Kieffer asked for a 15-minute respite, so that he could contact his superiors. This suited Miettinen, as he was also eager to report these developments to his brigade commander. During this pause the remaining German detachment on the island boarded their own vessels, and advised Mecke that the Finns had been at their battle stations for some time already. Mecke now had to make the decision whether to land or to withdraw; there was not much time left if he wished to complete the whole operation before first light.

At 00:40, a landing party of some 40 Germans disembarked and aimed their weapons at the Finns. At the same time, Mecke himself led a small assault party towards the beach hut in hope of capturing the Finnish

commander. However, Miettinen had correctly assessed the situation and escaped just moments before putting the whole island on full combat alert.

In order to make space for more landing craft, the two German vessels in harbour quickly withdrew to open water. Mecke ordered the attack to start immediately and told his men to prepare for Finnish resistance. The night was calm and would remain pitch-dark until around 01:00. The Finns were given permission to open fire. Following this decision, Miettinen and his adjutant jumped into a car to drive to the headquarters situated at Suurkylä village. Their attempt to stop and watch how the situation was developing was disrupted when bullets started whizzing past their heads. Before the two men escaped from the beach, they could see how the Germans would begin their assault along the whole harbour area.

In the afterglow of the muzzle flashes, the Finns observed several German ships approaching on the otherwise black sea. While intense shelling set some of the harbour buildings alight, the Germans in turn tried to aim their guns at the Finnish batteries guided by their muzzle flashes, but their own action only made it easier for the Finns to target the oncoming landing craft. Soon the Germans realised this and stopped firing in order to concentrate on putting their men ashore under the cover of darkness. In the resulting chaos, some of the assaulting troops were forced to swim the last few hundred metres to the shore.

The main landing established a bridgehead at Suurkylä harbour. From there, the German troops spilled towards Mäkipäällys, Majakallio and Pohjoiskorkia. Simultaneously, a secondary task force completed another landing on Kappelniemi Peninsula. The focus of this attack was the road towards Kiiskinkylä village. If the Germans could reach and hold Kiiskinkylä, the island could effectively be cut in half. During the night, several further landings were attempted at different parts of the island. Fierce battles were fought all along the beaches.

After the initial assault, the German naval guns were unable to provide effective support in the dark. Compared to the Finnish artillery, they had numerical superiority, but the defenders were well camouflaged and dug in. Problems for the Germans started to mount up soon after their first landings, as they were only able to disembark one artillery section and one mortar squad. Furthermore, communications to the ships at sea and to the naval command at Tallinn had stopped working. Despite these glitches, the harbour area and Suurkylä Bay were soon securely in German hands. Heavy naval bombardment destroyed several buildings and suppressed the defenders. Then the approaching dawn forced the Kriegsmarine to withdraw further out to sea. In the growing light they became easy targets for the Finnish artillery.

A German motorbike which did not manage to get farther than the shoreline during the attack at Suursaari, in an image taken a mere day after the foiled landing. (Sa-Kuva)

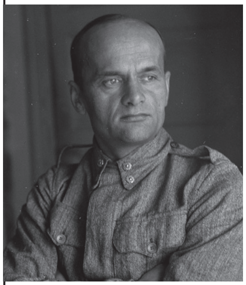
By 06:00, the Germans controlled about 3km of seafront at the northern end of the island. At this stage, they had only managed to advance about 1km inland. The weakness of their positions

was not lost on the Finns, who soon mounted a counter-attack in the hope of splitting the enemy. To the Finns' dismay, the Germans had managed to occupy the heights at Kotokallio. Recapturing the hill now became the priority and was largely achieved by 09:00. The Germans realised at this point that the island could not be taken quickly, and therefore requested another parley, hoping to negotiate a quick end to the fighting.

This time they explained to the Finns the strategic meaning of the island to the German war effort. Miettinen retorted that he was well aware of the location's significance after commanding the garrison there for the past few years. The Germans then proposed ceasing hostilities if they were allowed to peacefully withdraw back to their boats. Miettinen was only willing to consider their unconditional surrender and gave the Germans 15 minutes to decide. The Germans sent more officers to the negotiations, but Miettinen realised that this was just a ruse and ended the talks as purely a waste of time. While the officers conferred, the rank and file, former comrades in arms, met up to swap stories and to enjoy a cigarette or two. Several wounded Germans were also transferred over into the care of the Finnish field hospital.

After the talks failed, the fighting continued throughout the day, with the Finns trying to flush the Germans out of the landing zone with grenades and satchel charges. The Finnish Air Force was not available while all the intended German air support was also otherwise occupied. The Luftwaffe was being forced to engage flights of Soviet fighters, which had been sent to prevent the Germans from capturing the island. However, these would-be-helpers were not able to (or chose not to) differentiate between the two fighting sides and so their efforts tended to hinder as much as help the Finns.

It was crucial for the Finns to throw the invaders back to the sea before night fell again, otherwise they would be able to reinforce and rearm their



(1903–1976)

MARTTI MIETTINEN

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL
SUURSAARI GARRISON

Prior to the Winter War, Martti Juho Miettinen held several positions in the Coastal Artillery, at naval headquarters, the army headquarters in the Liaison Office and was an assistant to the Military Envoy to Moscow. During the conflict he led the garrison at Saarenpää and served as commander of the Vilajoki sector. For the duration of the Interim Peace, Miettinen worked with the cadets at the Naval School of Warfare.

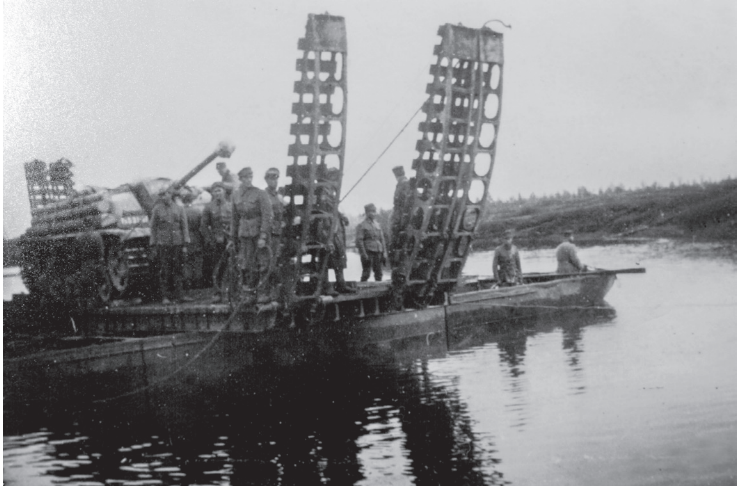
At the outset of the Continuation War, Miettinen served as commander of the 2nd Coastal Brigade and was involved in the capture of the Virolahti area islands on Viipuri Bay. Lieutenant-Colonel Miettinen helped plan the invasion of Suursaari in the winter of 1942, and took charge of the diversionary eastern attack. After the operation, Miettinen was made commander of the 12th Coastal Artillery Regiment. He led the capture of Tytärsaari Island and managed the Suursaari garrison. Miettinen was made a Knight of the Mannerheim Cross following his successful defence of Suursaari Island against the Germans in September 1944. He spent the years after the war as commander of the Uudenmaa Military District and finally as Inspector General of Artillery. He was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-general in May 1963.

landed forces under the cover of darkness. By late afternoon, the German force had been confined to four separate pockets. At this stage, Mecke was wounded and taken prisoner. After a piece of shrapnel had been removed from his neck, he managed to escape the Finnish field hospital and returned to his own men. However, he was now sorely dismayed having seen the Finnish preparations, and realised that his landing party could not win. So Mecke climbed back up Kotokallio Hill and surrendered to the Finns. From this base, he was able to telephone Miettinen, informing him that due to the lack of ammunition the Germans were willing to capitulate. He also asked the Finns to contact his superiors in Tallinn and advise them of the situation, with a recommendation that no more reinforcements be sent. Miettinen and Mecke agreed the terms of surrender by 18:45, while the actual process did not begin until later the same evening. Like so many times before, during the joint task force exercises of the past few years, both officers now toured the island, shouting: 'Cease fire! Combat has ended!'

In the end the Germans suffered 155 dead, while 1,231 men were captured with 175 wounded. Finnish casualties were 37 dead, 69 wounded, eight missing and seven captured. The battle was a significant political victory for the Finns as it enabled the government to demonstrate a case of actual fighting against the German forces. Furthermore, the battle had been fought immediately after the midnight deadline set in the armistice. The

The Germans withdrawing according to the set plans of Operation *Birke*, in an image taken in the Tiiksa area near Rukajärvi on 27 September 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

fact that the Germans had started hostilities against the Finns helped the nation to accept the morality of further military action against their former comrades-in-arms.



Once the Armoured Division had been committed to the Lapland War, its tanks normally found themselves at the forefront of the attack. Here a Stug assault gun is transported by ferry in Lapland in October 1944. (The Parola Armour Museum)

REGAINING LAPLAND

After the failure of the Germans' audacious attack at Suursaari, both sides now worried about the status of their tacit understanding in the north. Consequently, Usko Haahti returned again to Rovaniemi to make sure that the Germans were still committed to the arrangement. There, Rendulic confirmed that his Twentieth Mountain Army would continue to follow the agreed schedule. In the far north General Ferdinand Jodl's XIX Mountain Corps was to hold on to the Petsamo region in the face of Lieutenant-General Vladimir Shcherbakov's Fourteenth Army. In the direction of Salla, General Emil Vogel's XXXVI Mountain Corps faced Lieutenant-General George Kozlov's Nineteenth Army. Further south, Lieutenant-General Lev Skvirsky's Twenty-Sixth Army split its forces and advanced towards the Suomussalmi and Kuusamo areas. There German rearguard duties were performed by SS-Group Leader Karl Brenner's 6th SS-Mountain Division 'North' from General Friedrich Hochbaum's XVIII Mountain Corps. Most of Hochbaum's troops had already started their withdrawal towards western Finland (see map on p.282).

While elements of Puroma's 6th Division advanced to Puolanka, the 15th Brigade was given orders to occupy the city of Oulu. After being reinforced with elements from the Armoured Division, 15th Brigade was to continue to the Haukipudas–Kiiminki line. The Hyrynsalmi–Puolanka sector and the Kiiminginjoki River area were to be secured by Kuistio's 15th Brigade and Colonel Kustaa Inkala's Border Guards Brigade. If necessary, these units could draw help from two divisions left behind.

During the first half of September, the Finns continued evacuating civilians and concentrated their forces to the north. The principal goal of the troops that had already arrived in the Kajaani–Oulu sector was to hold their ground. Only when they were completely convinced that they would be met with no resistance should they advance further. On 18 September, Puroma received orders that his 6th Division was to send a detachment

to Suomussalmi, while the main body of his force was to advance to Puolanka. The command of 15th Brigade was passed from Kuistio to Lagus' Armoured Division. The mission of this combined force was to guard the crossings on the Oulu River. At this juncture, following the guidelines set in Operation *Birke*, the Germans began the systematic destruction of the transport network. At the southern edges of their occupation area they were satisfied with merely blowing up the road and railway bridges. However, further north they either demolished or planted mines and booby traps in all dwellings and on all roads.

On the morning of 19 September, headquarters ordered the 6th Division to start advancing northwards. On 22 September, Inkala's task force advancing towards Suomussalmi met up with Soviet troops who had crossed the border nearby. Western elements of the division reached Puolanka two days later. The Finnish advance was well scheduled with the Germans and no conflict erupted. In addition to planting mines on the roads and destroying all the bridges, the Germans to the east assumed that the Soviets were observing them more closely, and some homesteads were also razed.

On 20 September, the Armoured Division commander Ruben Lagus arrived at Oulu. Mannerheim had given his task force the command of Puroma's 6th Division. On 24 September, Lagus ordered all troops under his command to begin their advance. The 15th Brigade was to proceed along the coastal road towards Kemi, while the Armoured Division would march to Pudasjärvi. In reality, only the 1st Jäger Brigade of the Armoured Division could depart for Pudasjärvi in time, since the rest of the division's transports did not arrive in Oulu until the following day.

The Soviets were becoming very dissatisfied with the Finnish efforts to fulfil the terms of the armistice agreement. So far, according to them, not enough vigour had gone into driving the German forces out of the country. Mannerheim was duly worried that the Red Army would soon interfere unless some real military progress was made. He decided to give the task of evicting the Germans to Lieutenant-General Hjalmar Siilasvuo. Mannerheim expected that Siilasvuo would act with more alacrity than many of the other senior officers available. According to his new plans, all the troops concentrated into northern Finland would now form the new III Army Corps. Siilasvuo's first orders were for the internment of all the German forces in northern Finland. The total forces under his command now included Puroma's 6th, Pajari's 3rd and Heiskanen's 11th divisions, Lagus' Armoured Division, as well as the 15th and the Border Guard brigades. On 27 September, Siilasvuo officially took charge on his arrival at headquarters in Oulu. He immediately put a stop to all communication

between the German commanders and the Finnish liaison officers in Rovaniemi, marking the end of the 'Phoney War'.

It seems that Mannerheim was right to count on the promptness of Siilasvuo. On the very first day of his command, Siilasvuo gave new orders to the 5th Jäger Battalion (from 1st Jäger Brigade of the Armoured Division). They were to immediately divert from the schedule agreed with the Germans and instead to proceed to Pudasjärvi as rapidly as possible, knowing full well that according to the original plan the Germans would not retreat from there before 2 October.

Early on the morning of 28 September, the men of the 5th Jäger Battalion encountered German picket lines some 20km south-west of Pudasjärvi. The Finns insisted that the Germans surrender. When they refused, the Jäger opened fire. The shocked Germans wanted to parley and tried to diffuse the situation. Initially, the Finns refused to enter into any negotiations, but eventually Major Veikko Lounila, the commander of the battalion, agreed that his troops would stand their ground until the Germans had withdrawn from the area. This exchange was the first actual firefight in Lapland. Two Germans lost their lives, four were wounded and two were taken prisoner. The Finns captured one lorry and one motorbike. Many of the Germans saw the Finnish actions as the starkest betrayal. Over the years of happy

A T-34/85 tank fording a river in the direction of Rovaniemi in October 1944. (The Parola Armour Museum)

garrisoning of Lapland, many had developed lifelong friendships, married or put down roots in the country.

The incident was well timed as on 5 October the Allied Control Commission arrived in Finland. Their task was to observe, supervise and ensure that the Finns fulfilled the terms of the armistice agreement. The commission was chaired by General-Colonel Andrew Zhdanov, a close comrade of Stalin's. Zhdanov had a reputation as a ruthless oppressor, but despite this, his actions proved more lenient than the Finns originally feared.

THE TORNIO LANDING

So far the choreographed withdrawal of the German forces from Lapland had gone well. There were only a few minor incidents and actual firefights, while several mock engagements had been fought in order to fool the Allied Control Commission. Unfortunately, they remained unconvinced and pressured the Finns to take more decisive action or accept direct aid from the Red Army. Anticipating this eventuality, and in order to showcase the nation's efforts, Siilasvuo had been preparing a regiment-strong landing to the rear of the German forces at Kemi.

On 29 September, the 11th Infantry Regiment was in transit to Oulu harbour, where they were to board vessels earmarked for a landing at Kemi. During their march though the town of Oulu the men were not especially quiet. Instead, they shouted openly that they were on their way to liberate Kemi. Somehow the Finnish high command found out about this incident and was convinced that the Germans would have heard as well. They therefore ordered the whole operation to be cancelled. Abandoning the landing seemed very sensible, as alarming news was received from the battalion-strong Task Force P, which at the start of the conflict had withdrawn south in order to protect the industrial complexes at Kemi. They now radioed headquarters that Kemi was held by relatively strong German forces, including a Stuka flight squadron. In addition, the timing was poor, as a German infantry regiment and some 60 tanks were currently passing through the region. According to the intelligence, the deep-water outer harbour had been partially blockaded by railway wagons, tugboats and assorted machinery that had been sunk next to the pier, and the inner harbour closer to the town centre was further secured by tanks and gun batteries. Combined with the weather turning for the worse, the Kemi assault did not seem sensible.

Nevertheless, Siilasvuo was not ready to give up on the idea of cutting off the Germans' retreat. A successful landing would sever one of their main routes to Norway. In the best case, he could trap tens of thousands of soldiers.

Finnish infantry advancing over open terrain towards Kemi on 7 October 1944. The soldier in the foreground is armed with a captured Soviet Dektaryev light machine gun, or 'Emma' as the Finns called it. The attack's focus was on the distant but prominent town-hall tower. The following day, the town was finally liberated. (Sa-Kuva)

He actually liked the idea so much that he made up his mind to postpone the landing by just one day and to redirect the attack to Röyttä harbour at Tornio. He also decided not to inform Mannerheim or the rest of the high command of his intentions. Tornio town lay about 27km north-west of Kemi, straddling the border with Sweden at the north of the Gulf of Bothnia. This was the northernmost spot where the Finns could land forces from the sea.

Mannerheim phoned Siilasvuo on the evening of 30 September to tell him about a threatening missive he had just received from the Allied Control Commission. In their letter, the Soviets demanded in the strictest terms that the Finns immediately begin combat action against the Germans. Mannerheim requested that Siilasvuo do something visible, and quickly. Siilasvuo promised that he would return with good news the following day. That night he launched his daring operation that was to turn the 'Phoney War' into an altogether real one.

Not long after the conversation between Siilasvuo and Mannerheim, landing craft departed from Oulu. The first wave of three commercial steamers, carrying the 2,900 men of Lieutenant-Colonel Wolf Halsti's 11th Infantry Regiment, was to sail unescorted. When it came to the landing no air support or heavy weapons would be available. At the same time, local civilians started to evacuate Röyttä harbour. The night was rainy and the wind had picked up; hopefully, this would keep the German planes at Kemi grounded. From a military viewpoint, the assault was a real gamble.

A Finnish Stug assault gun crossing a river in Ranua, northern Finland, during the Lapland War in 1944. While many Soviet tanks had been employed by the Finnish Army from the moment they had been captured, most had to be repaired by the army depot at Varkaus. There the innovative, although poorly equipped, mechanical staff came up with improvements for the special conditions of Finland. One of the most iconic Finnish modifications was the lashing of tree trunks onto a Stug's sides in order to improve its armour. This proved highly effective against both Soviet and German forces. (The Parola Armour Museum)

OPPOSITE
A T-34/85 (Ps245-6) fording a river in the Pudasjärvi area. With the Germans destroying practically every bridge and river crossing in Lapland, a large part of the tankers' time was spent waiting for pioneers to find a suitably low crossing point or to erect the bridges anew. (Courtesy of the private collection of Esa Muikku)

Men from Task Force P had infiltrated Tornio earlier, and now with the local Civil Guard they started their sabotage missions. At 02:00, this motley company of 327 men drove a train engine and empty carriages from Tornio central station to wait at the Röyttä deep sea harbour to be at the disposal of the landing force that was due to arrive later in the morning. This train was to prove very useful in quickly moving the forces of the landing party around. The next goal of the Civil Guards was to take control of Tornio town centre and all the nearby bridges. Although these operations disturbed and committed some German forces before the actual landings, their impact remained relatively low. While the large supply depot and railway station remained in German hands, the solders at least managed to keep the road to Sweden open. Soon 36 trucks, which the Finns had audaciously driven across the border into Sweden unnoticed (at Pello much further up north), would arrive along this road. By cutting across a neutral nation, the trucks arrived at the harbour unchallenged by the Germans. There they proved vital for the logistics and supply of the landing force.

Early in the morning of 1 October, the steamers slipped unobserved into Röyttä harbour. Upon their arrival, the vessels had to glide past the heavy anti-aircraft battery that the Germans had stationed at Laivasaari Island. The Finns were lucky – the lookouts must have been dozing – and the landing started in secret. Disembarking using narrow gangplanks and unloading the freighters with the help of the few cranes available

took several hours. Once emptied, the three vessels went straight back to Oulu for further reinforcements. They would proceed to sail this route several times over the next few days.

The 'loud-mouthed' 11th Infantry Regiment arrived with the first wave. At 08:00, the first of the attacking battalions began cycling towards the railway bridge at Kirkkopudas. Meanwhile the second battalion embarked on the train that the Civil Guard troops had relocated to this stretch of the tracks. This enabled the men to quickly reach the Tornio station area. From there the men of the 11th Infantry Regiment proceeded towards the city centre, where fighting continued between the Civil Guard men and other volunteers against the German supply forces in the area. There had been no time to evacuate the town, so the civilians were left to take cover as best they could. After striking these first blows, the Finns expected to soon face a strong German counter-attack. In preparation, the men were ordered to hunker down into defensive positions, and the chance for a quick and decisive surprise attack was lost. This decision was based on an inflated assessment of German forces in the area. The attack therefore ground to a halt in the district around the station. The Germans tried to stall for time. They repeatedly asked for talks with the aim of convincing the Finns to agree to return to the earlier terms of the 'Phoney War', including the schedules of staggered retreats and advances.

(1905–1985)

WOLF HALSTI

LIEUTENANT-COLONEL
11TH REGIMENT

During the mobilisation of 1939, Wolfgang Hallstén Halsti was made the quartermaster of the 5th Division. When the Continuation War began, he first became the chief of operations for 12th Division, and then the chief of staff for Division J at Kiestinki. In November 1941, Halsti was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and made quartermaster of III Army Corps.

In March 1944, Pajari took over the 3rd Division and Halsti became his chief of staff. During the Lapland War, Halsti commanded the 11th Infantry Regiment of the 3rd Division in the first wave of the Tornio landings. His regiment also took part in the capture of Rovaniemi. From the ashes of this once bustling town, his men continued the pursuit of the Germans to Karesuvanto in the far north-west of Finland. In October 1944, Halsti was awarded the Mannerheim Cross for his efforts during the Tornio landings.

After the war, Halsti worked in insurance and continued his career as a military writer. In 1939, prior to the Winter War, the first edition of his work on the defence of Finland had been heavily edited at the request of the Finnish foreign ministry; it was published uncensored in 2005. Halsti was promoted to colonel in 1970. Halsti published several highly respected books about Finland's wars against the USSR.

Men and equipment embark onto transport ships at Toppila harbour in Oulu. Their destination was Röyttä deep-sea harbour at Tornio. (Sa-Kuva)

Around midday, the Germans organised a feeble effort to retake the town. They still believed that the disturbance was caused by just a small number of local Civil Guard troops. None the wiser, the local area commandant, Major-General Mathias Kräutler, sent in a motorised counter-attack under the command of SS-Senior Assault Leader Schiff. His task force consisted of an infantry and pioneer detachments as well as an anti-aircraft battery. The task force soon ran into a Finnish ambush, and the main body of troops was encircled. During the night, Schiff's *motti* was destroyed, and the 30 survivors were taken prisoner.

Only after the demise of Schiff's command did the Germans grasp that the Finns had landed a whole regiment at Tornio. Kräutler started to immediately pull in his troops from outside the town in order to deal with this threat. This was not a simple task, as his men were dispersed over a very large area, and some were already on their way to Kilpisjärvi for the crossing over to Norway. Furthermore, his forces in Kemi were already engaged with the Finnish 15th Infantry Regiment, which was attacking from the south along the coastal road. Even more men were needed to keep at bay Task Force P, which was positioned on the islands outside Kemi for the protection of the industrial infrastructure there. At least for the moment, the Finns had decisive superiority in the area.

The Finnish armoured spearhead arrives at devastated Rovaniemi on 17 October 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Unfortunately for the Finns, before this opportunity could be exploited, a chance discovery made by the vanguard rendered the Finnish forces mostly ineffective. When the Finns captured the so-called 'Little Berlin' supply dumps near the station, they came across the food stores for Army Command Lapland. In addition to the essentials, they also discovered copious amounts of alcohol. This soon led to an ad hoc party and all the men hoarding bottles. The officers present also joined in, and chose not to let their superiors know what was going on. As the drink flowed, the atmosphere soon turned riotous and chaotic. When Siilasvuo found out what had happened a few hours later, he immediately sent all available officers to take control of the

situation. By now, the damage was done: the 1st and 2nd battalions were unable to continue fighting. The more sober men helped the officers to pacify the troops; the most belligerent ones were placed into custody. Meanwhile the attack petered out in front of the German positons at the large fields of Kyläjoki. Despite the best efforts of the rank and file, the official spoils still totalled 25,000 litres of alcohol. This delay ruined any Finnish chances of an easy, decisive victory and gave the Germans a further 24 hours for their preparations.

The next morning, Pajari and his staff officers arrived to lead the operations, bringing with them the second wave of 2,500 men. By now the German reinforcements had also started to arrive by train from the garrison at Rovaniemi. Elements of the 211th Panzer Battalion were among the first to arrive, followed by the grenadier and mountain battalions, and an anti-tank company later during the day. In addition, the Germans gave orders for the Machine-Gun Ski Brigade 'Finland' to return to Tornio. These elite soldiers had already made it all the way to Ivalo, but were now forced to send two battalions back to Tornio. The other German forces were asked to stand aside on the road so that these men would have a clear path for their forced march. They finally arrived in Tornio on 3 October.

From his own divisions, Kräutler could only produce the 6th SS-Reconnaissance Battalion and one infantry battalion. His total forces now consisted of six infantry battalions, an under-strength armoured battalion and three artillery batteries. Three of these battalions formed a defensive task force north of Tornio under the command of Captain Wutti, while

(1896–1968)

MARTTI AHO
COLONEL
50TH INFANTRY REGIMENT

Martti Johannes Aho took part in the Finnish Civil War, after which he officially joined the Finnish Armed Forces. From 1919 to 1920, he took part in the Aunus Expedition. Aho completed the course for reservist officers in 1921, and moved over to the Border Guards. He completed lieutenant's training in 1932, a machine-gun and mortar course in 1936, and finally the captain course in 1939. During the Winter War, Aho first led a company, and then the 8th Independent Battalion. Towards the end of the conflict he took over a battalion from the 38th Infantry Regiment. Aho was wounded twice during the Winter War.

When the Continuation War began, Aho acted as the head of operations for the 11th Division, and from 21 July onwards he led the division's 50th Infantry Regiment. Lieutenant-Colonel Aho was named the 52nd Knight of the Mannerheim Cross on 1 May 1942. This accolade was bestowed due to his earlier efforts and help in capturing Äänislinna. During the period of trench warfare, Aho's regiment served on the Syväri front. He was promoted to the rank of colonel on 23 June 1944. Only four days later Aho was to take part in the defensive battles at Tali–Ihantala. He was wounded again in combat on 29 June.

By the onset of the Lapland War, Colonel Aho had recovered sufficiently to lead his 50th Infantry Regiment into battle north of Tornio. On 16 October 1944, Aho received his second Mannerheim Cross (one of only six to receive this) with the following citation: 'Colonel Aho has worked for the defence of Tornio since 6.10. and led the counter-attack with especially good results. His regiment penetrated between the [Germans'] northern and eastern fronts, manoeuvring to their rear. This resulted in a *motti* holding the enemy's forward elements. For two days his regiment withstood all the breakthrough attempts in the most difficult of conditions – until the night of the 8th when the remaining enemy forces [around 500 men] surrendered.'

the main force led by Major Krenzer was to assemble on the east side of the town. The Finns at the bridgehead were able to put in ten battalions from the 3rd Division. The German troops did, however, have much more firepower, especially heavy artillery.

When negotiations did not progress the way the Germans wished, they tried taking civilian hostages, which they threatened to shoot if the Finns would not return all the German prisoners captured during the fighting so far. Although a total of 130 civilians were taken from Kemi and a further 132 from Rovaniemi, Siilasvuo refused to give in to the German demands. Instead, he had Halsti inform the Germans that harming even one of the civilians would cause the Finns to immediately retaliate in a heinous way: executing all prisoners of war as well as the staff and patients of the German Military Hospital at Tornio. The Germans realised that their blackmail attempt had failed and eventually returned all the hostages in good shape.

By 3 October, the weather had cleared sufficiently for three Finnish Brewster fighters to fly escort for the ships as they brought in yet more reinforcements. During their northward trek from Oulu, they had already been forced to fend off at least one Junkers Ju-88 bomber. Just after the 2,600 men had disembarked, the Stuka squadron struck Röyttä harbour. Three soldiers died while another 20 were wounded. Unfortunately the Finnish air escort, having watched their men alight, had already turned back for their base at Vaala.

The Germans next tried to liberate Tornio by attacking along the road from Kemi. This was repelled and Halsti in turn tried to send units to circle behind the attacking forces. The men veered too far and could not carry out the planned pincer movement. During the afternoon, the Germans renewed their efforts with the support of tanks and heavy artillery. This time the Finnish line was breached and only a timely counter-attack pushed the enemy back. The rough weather over the last few days had hindered the Finns' unloading of the transport ships, but now with the weather clearing, armoured and artillery companies were finally on their way.

On Wednesday 4 October, the German bombers happened on the harbour just as the fourth wave of troops was being offloaded. The latter included Aho's 50th Infantry Regiment, which soon went into action. Due to poor weather to the south around their base at Vaala, the Finnish Brewsters were all grounded. Unhindered, a flight of nine Stuka dive-bombers was able to inflict 60 fatalities and 400 wounded amongst the Finns. Moreover, two of the landing vessels were sunk, taking with them 196 horses as well as 120 tons of munitions and foodstuffs. Unfortunately, the anti-aircraft equipment and vehicles were among the last items due to

be offloaded and so were also lost. Luckily for the Finns, the heavy artillery that should have been on these ships had just missed the loading and was still waiting at Oulu harbour.

To further their woes, the heavy German anti-aircraft battery at Laivaniemi, about 10km east of Tornio, now stirred into action. Having shelled and razed the outlying islands blocking their view the previous day, this battery was now able to direct its heavy guns against Röyttä harbour. With great precision and skill, the battery managed to badly damage the piers and the docking area. This made further attempts at offloading any heavy equipment, especially artillery, very difficult.

It was now Kräutler's turn to push for a decisive victory. The reinforced Task Force Krenzer attacked from the direction of Kemi. This effort was supported by artillery and the Stuka dive-bombers. Meanwhile, the defensive positions of two Finnish battalions at the river narrows of Alavojakkala, 7km north of Tornio, were threatened by three German infantry and one armoured battalion. This attack quickly overran the Finnish lines, forcing the defenders to flee back towards Tornio in disarray. The German attack was finally halted 3km from Tornio. The Finns were also forced to retreat on the Kemi front.

On Friday, the final wave of 2,000 men arrived at Röyttä. In addition, the gunboats *Uusimaa* and *Hämeenmaa* sailed into the port, providing the Finns with some heavy naval artillery. These ships also took over anti-aircraft responsibilities and exchanged volleys with the German battery at Laivaniemi. The Finns now fielded four infantry battalions more than the Germans, who in turn had access to much more artillery and armoured vehicles.

While the Finns unquestionably controlled the seaboard, all the roads leading to the area were firmly in German hands. Using the poorly guarded wilderness between these few roads, Aho managed to send two companies from his 50th Infantry Regiment to loop around the north side of Tornio. This operation was a complete success, and managed to trap the Germans in a 3km-long *motti* on the Tornio River. Fierce battles ensued, during which some of the enemy managed to break out during the night along the riverbank. The Germans left behind at least 500 dead, while another 337 men were captured by the Finns.

In the direction of Kemi, Task Force Krenzer launched a determined attack of its own. Despite the heavy attrition, his men nearly broke through the outer defences. The last of Krenzer's soldiers fell within metres of the Finnish positions, before the attack was finally thwarted. This was to be the last day of fighting at Tornio. During the evening the remaining German

forces started their retreat back towards the towns of Kemi and Rovaniemi. On 6 October, the Twentieth Mountain Army decided to cease all attempts to retake Tornio. Kuistio's 15th Brigade continued advancing along the coastal road towards Kemi. After overrunning the German lines at the Simojoki River, it proceeded to surround the town on 7 October. The next day, together with Task Force P, the 15th Brigade finally liberated Kemi, and soon these forces joined fronts with Pajari's landing party at Tornio.

During the battles for Kemi, the Finns lost 519 men. The residential areas did suffer some damage, but luckily an attempt to blow up the town hall failed. The Stuka aircraft bombed all the storage facilities, but only the airfield was completely destroyed. Capturing Kemi prevented the Germans from launching any more attacks towards Tornio from the east. Instead, they were now forced to retreat directly north towards their garrisons at Rovaniemi. In the Tornio and Kemi fighting, German casualties were more than 700 dead and 2,000 wounded while 337 soldiers were taken prisoner.

The advance of the Finnish vanguards was often fraught with danger. The fleeing mountain troops had booby-trapped and laid mines on practically all paths and roadways. Here a team of pioneers and Finnish assault guns practise joint operations on 25 August 1944. Little did they know at the time that only a month later they would be doing this for real, and in a war against their former ally. (Sa-Kuva)

During the battle for Tornio, the Finns lost a total of 1,240 men: 189 dead, 1,026 wounded and 25 missing in action. Despite these losses, the landing was a success, although some of the strategic goals were not met. The Finns failed to destroy or imprison all of the German forces in the Tornio area. More importantly, the Kemi–Rovaniemi road remained open. This enabled the strong German formations north of Oulu to continue their retreat first to Rovaniemi and from there to western Lapland.

Tornio itself was recaptured with relatively little damage, and most importantly the key bridges to Sweden over the Tornio River remained intact. The political impact of the landing was very significant. Finland was now embroiled in open and bitter war with the Germans. The leaders of the Soviet Union were finally convinced that the Finns were able and more importantly willing to clear the country on their own, and the promises and threats of Soviet help and intervention became more distant. After the battle, the Finns were able to hand over to the Allies 558 German prisoners

of war. In practice this meant passing them directly to the Soviets, as no feasible transport to the United Kingdom, the United States or France existed.

Rendulic saw the Finnish attack on Tornio as a gross betrayal. The day after the landings started, he gave extensive orders for destruction of all property across Lapland. All industrial facilities, and especially the mining facilities in Petsamo, had to be razed to the ground. On 13 October, the Twentieth Mountain Army was issued further orders to destroy all the buildings above the Ylitornio–Sinettä–Sodankylä line, to deny the Finns any shelter during the coming winter months.[9]

THE 'CHILDREN'S CRUSADE'

In the aftermath of these battles, the Finnish high command ordered the III Army Corps to capture and imprison the bulk of German forces south of Rovaniemi. In order for this to happen, the retreat from Kemi and Tornio towards the town had to be first contained by Pajari's 3rd Division. Meanwhile, Heiskanen's 11th Division was sent north to Muonio village in order to cut off the Germans' northerly escape route to Norway. The remainder of Siilasvuo's forces would swing in from the south in order to spring the trap at Rovaniemi. First, Inkala's Border Guard Brigade was to attack through Taivalkoski to Posio (under command of Colonel E. Juva from 8 October), while Puroma's 6th Division and elements of the Armoured Division were to advance to Ranua village from their positions at Pudasjärvi.

The Germans continued to delay the Finns at every opportunity by laying mines or destroying roads. At times their rearguard would also fight holding engagements at pre-built roadside fortifications. The main goal was to buy time for the main body of their forces to get far enough ahead of their pursuers. What usually happened was that the well-armed rearguard was able to halt the Finnish vanguard. In turn, this would force the Finns to first scout the surrounding area and then proceed with exhausting encircling attacks on the roadblock. Often the assaulting troops would only be able to drag light arms across the boggy terrain. At the very last moment, the extensively motorised Germans would escape along the road to their next fortified base. The last squad to depart would blow up the base, the road or the bridge supports, further hindering their pursuers. Then they would

9 Before the fall of Tornio, the Germans had predominantly tried to conserve civilian targets and followed much more lenient orders for destruction; only near the eastern border had some villages been put to the torch.

lay in wait for the Finns to reach their next roadblock. This cat and mouse scenario would be replayed again and again.

The destroyed roads and continuous danger of minefields soon caused the Finnish supply columns to lag far behind. This meant that the Finnish vanguard had to survive on water and crisp breads, and ammunition had to be carefully rationed.

On 5 October, while the battle still raged in Tornio, the German high command issued Rendulic with orders (codenamed Operation *Nordlicht – Northern Lights*) to withdraw all of his troops from Finland and northern Norway. His army was to take up new defensive positions at the fortifications being built at the Lyngen Fjord in Norway. However, before Jodl's XIX Mountain Corps could break contact on the Petsamo front, the Soviets started their own attack. This forced Rendulic unexpectedly to redirect Lieutenant-General Georg Radziej's 169th Infantry Division (part of Vogel's XXXVI Mountain Corps) from Salla to their aid. The Soviet thrust soon became a much more serious threat than any of the Finnish manoeuvres on the Germans' southern flank. Near Lake Pudasjärvi, the 1st Jäger Brigade, marching in the vanguard of Task Force Lagus, had been fighting against Lieutenant-General August Krakau's 7th Mountain Division. Their decisive battle was fought just south of Rovaniemi between 6 and 9 October. Eventually, the Jäger managed to encircle and trap some of the Germans in a *motti*, but a decisive counter-attack by the rest of the German division set their comrades free.

What happened next was that the Allied Control Commission gave the Germans a positive surprise. While, on the one hand, demanding more aggressive and decisive action from the Finns, on the other they hindered operations by dictating that the recently arrived 15th Division would not be sent to the front, instead remaining in reserve at Tornio. Similarly, the 19th Brigade was ordered to remain at Raahe. Despite these limitations, the observers were apparently perplexed at how the Finns still failed to surround the three German corps. On 10 October, under the commission's increased pressure, Mannerheim sent the following written reprimand to Siilasvuo: 'I want to force you to take note of the reoccurring phenomena where all the surrounded German forces always manage to break free. This kind of operation must absolutely be carried out with sufficiently strong forces [to prevent this from happening in future].'

It is worth noting that later the same year, as thanks for their achievements in Lapland and especially at the Tornio landing, Siilasvuo, Pajari and Haahti were granted Finland's highest military award, the Mannerheim Cross. Part of the personal commendation from Mannerheim to Siilasvuo read: 'The

(1896–1948)

ANDREW ZHDANOV

COLONEL GENERAL AND CHAIRMAN ALLIED CONTROL COMMISSION

Andrew Aleksandrovits Zhdanov became a member of the Politburo and the Secretariat in 1934. By 1939 he had achieved full membership of the Politburo and became the head of the Propaganda and Agitation Department of the Central Committee.

As Stalin's close confidant, he oversaw the Russification of the Baltics and was responsible for the establishment of the Estonian Soviet Republic, which was soon annexed to the Soviet Union.

Between 1940 and 1941, Zhdanov had responsibility for the defence of Leningrad. Colonel-General Zhdanov signed the armistice agreement with Finland on 19 September 1944, and acted as the chairman of the Allied Control Commission in Finland until the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947. From 1946 to 1947, Zhdanov also acted as the chairman of the Soviet Union.

By 1948, his alcoholism and poor health had contributed to his estrangement from Stalin and his removal from office. Zhdanov was moved to a sanatorium, where he died from heart failure on 31 August. He had been groomed as Stalin's successor, but in the end his poor health led to his early demise. It is possible that his death was not a natural one.

operation was in many ways extremely difficult and massive in its scope. He led with determination and alacrity overcoming obstacles in whatever form they were presented'. Pajari's cross was his second, making him one of only six people ever to become a double awardee.[10]

A few days after Mannerheim's stern message, the Finns again failed to prevent the Germans from fleeing the Rovaniemi area. The 3rd Division had sent troops to cut the road west from the town, but they simply did not have the manpower to do so. On 16 October, the last of the German soldiers left the now desolated town of Rovaniemi. Hardly a chimneystack was left standing, and afterwards the Germans tried to blame the accidental detonation of an ammunition train for the destruction of the town.

The following day the Allied Control Commission sent another missive to Mannerheim. In this, they insisted that the German forces must be captured and stripped of arms without delay. A few days later, Mannerheim ratified orders for reinforcing III Army Corps and the formation of the new Army Group Lapland. Paradoxically, these plans, however, had to be abandoned, as the observers reminded Finland that it must decommission its army within the given dates, no matter what.

On 20 October, the Jäger of the Armoured Division occupied the village of Sodankylä. Almost nothing remained of this once bustling rural centre. Advancing in the wake of the armoured troops, the 6th Division was now ordered to turn back home for their discharge from service. On 23 October, the Armoured Division reached the German fortifications at Tankavaara, the famous gold-mining area north of Vuotso. The Finnish assault started three days later and continued unsuccessfully until 31 October, when the German leadership granted permission for their troops to continue withdrawing.

10 The 1st and 2nd Class were awarded to only Mannerheim and Heinrichs. The 2nd Class was awarded twice to: Pajari, Aho, Juutilainen and Wind.

A Finnish soldier watches the embers of the burning homes at Muonio on 30 October 1944. (Sa-Kuva)

Meanwhile, XIX Mountain Corps proceeded to retreat from the Petsamo region, fighting a series of fierce defensive battles against the oncoming Soviets at their emplacements south of Ivalo village. The German troops in western Lapland had their orders to withdraw from Muonio village after 30 October. The Finns were always trying to catch up to surround these formations, but arrived just a little bit too late. They ended up occupying the deserted German positions the same day that Muonio was abandoned. The southern portion of the German army that the Finns had so desperately tried to entrap had managed to escape.

At the end of October 1944 Finnish forces in Lapland peaked at a strength of 75,000 men. In accordance with the terms of the armistice agreement, the army had to be reduced to its maximum permissible peacetime strength by 5 December. This forced the rapid discharge of all the more experienced soldiers. Only those who had been in active service for less than two years or those who had been born in 1924 or 1925 were allowed to remain on active duty. Some career officers and highly specialised or air force units were given dispensation to ignore the demilitarisation. As only the youngest and greenest of troops could continue the fight against the Germans, this part of the Lapland War soon became known as the ‘Children’s Crusade’.

By the beginning of December, Finnish forces in Lapland had been reduced to 12,000 men. The battalions that remained in the area were condensed to roughly half of their normal wartime strength. After this date, most of the Finnish forces were to be stationed in their peacetime garrisons instead of on the Lapland front. Only troops that would have normally been

Eventually the retreating Germans stopped all pretence of withdrawing with good grace. A Finnish soldier despairs over the destruction on 30 October 1944, as only the church has been left standing in the once-bustling town of Kittilä. (Sa-Kuva)

located in the northern Finland were allowed to remain to take part in the conflict. On 5 December, III Army Corps was reduced in size to the peacetime 1st Division.

Earlier in November, the 1st Jäger Brigade was advancing towards Ivalo village when orders to downgrade to peacetime strength reached the men. This left the unit with three under-strength battalions with a total of 750 soldiers. By the beginning of December, the Finns had reached the Norwegian border at Karigasniemi. All the objectives of the armistice had been fulfilled on this front. Further to the south-east, the Soviet troops that had entered Finland withdrew from the country. From 1 December onwards, the Border Guards took over patrolling the new national boundaries from the Jäger.

Meanwhile, in the Arm of Finland (the north-westerly protruding part of the country), the strong enemy formations proceeded to retreat without hurrying. The punctual Germans were able to keep to their plans, despite the best efforts of Siilasvuo's pursuing 1st Division. The division's harrying was finally halted by the last German defensive lines just west of Kaaresuvanto hamlet. During January 1945, the last of the German forces withdrew from their positions at Kaaresuvanto to the Finnish border, crossing at Kilpisjärvi. Here the Finns continued with trench warfare far into the spring with the only 600-strong Task Force Loimu. By now even these forces were becoming redundant, as the Germans had already withdrawn their forces from northern Norway and around Ruija. In the process, the departing Wehrmacht soldiers had organised the evacuation of all civilians, destroyed the infrastructure and burned all the houses.

The final exchange of fire of the war occurred at Kilpisjärvi, on 25 April 1945. Two days later, the last German soldiers finally departed, with Siilasvuo, commander of 1st Division, informing Mannerheim: 'All German armed forces have been ousted from northern Finland at 13:30 on 27 April.' The Finns took this as the de facto end of the war, although no peace agreement or armistice was ever signed. Most of Norway remained in German hands despite the fact that the Allies already controlled large parts of their homeland.

REBUILDING LAPLAND

The last day of the Lapland War, 27 April, is still celebrated in Finland in honour of all the nation's war veterans. During the war, the Finns lost 774

Finnish troops moving north from Muonio on 31 October 1944 were met with a sign where, under the SS insignia, the following embittered message was scrawled: '*Als Dank für nicht bewiesene Waffenbrüderschaft*', which roughly translates as 'Thank you for the comradeship-in-arms which you failed to demonstrate!' (Sa-Kuva)

dead, 2,904 wounded and 262 missing in action. One-third of the casualties were caused by landmines. The losses suffered by the over 200,000-strong Twentieth Mountain Army, at 22,236, were comparably lower than those of other units on the Eastern Front. However, this 'undefeated' army's staged retreat from Finland and Arctic Norway had cost them as many men as their initial Operation *Silberfuchs* in 1941. (Erfurth, n.d.)

The prisoners taken were handed over to the Soviet authorities, and those who survived the gruelling conditions of the concentration camps began to gradually return home during the 1950s. Most of the Finns who had been captured by the Germans were taken to Norway, and freed in the spring of 1945.

Lapland was completely razed to the ground. Some 16,500 buildings had been destroyed, and the entire road network had been bulldozed and booby-trapped. A total of 233 railway bridges and 516 road bridges were blown up. More than half of the reindeer population had perished, with only 115,000 remaining in 1945. Over 100,000 refugees returned to their homesteads after the war; most had lost all their earthly possessions.[11]

11 It was not until 1954 that the Finnish parliament formally concluded that the war with Germany, which had begun on 15 September 1944, was now over.

TASTA PAIKASTA
AMMUTTIIN SUOMEN
SODAN 1941 - 45
VIIMEISET
TYKINLAUKAUKSET
HUHTIKUUSSA 1945
MUISTOMERKIN PYSTYTTI
POHJANMAAN TYKISTÖRYKMENTIN
KILTA RY 1967.

CHAPTER 14
TOWARDS PEACE

By the summer of 1945, Finland had finally freed itself of foreign forces. In accordance with the 1944 armistice agreement, many areas that had never been occupied by Finland's enemies during the war would now have to be handed over to the Soviets. In addition to the territory already lost in the settlement of the Winter War, the Soviets now demanded the Petsamo region. This area was rich in minerals and provided Finland's only access to the Barents Sea. They would also lease the Porkkala naval base near Helsinki for the following 50 years. The country's northernmost power plant at Jäniskoski was also taken. These land concessions and accompanying terms were later ratified by the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty.

Between 1939 and 1945, Finland had suffered three wars, none of which it had wanted to fight. Although Finland was forced to yield before the great Soviet Union, its will had not been broken.

A memorial stone erected near Kilpisjärvi by the Pohjanmaa Artillery Regiment's Guild in 1967 on the spot where the last shots of Finland's wars were fired in April 1945. (Courtesy of Sakke and Kirsti Nenye)

Despite losing the war, it had successfully defended its independence. Helsinki remained the only capital city of a combatant nation in World War II on the continent of Europe that was not occupied.

The final four years of war had cost the small nation dearly. Over 600,000 men and 100,000 women gave their best years for Finnish independence. The wars left 30,000 widows and 50,000 orphans. Half a million people out of the total population of 3.7 million lost their homes during the conflict. After the Winter War, 24,286 Finns never returned to their homes, while those killed or missing in the Continuation War amounted to 63,204. The war in Lapland had caused 2,872 deaths, with a further 479 killed during 1945. (Leskinen, 2005) All in all, World War II resulted in the deaths of 93,563 Finnish soldiers and female auxiliaries. In addition, Soviet bombing raids had killed 957 Finnish non combatants in the Winter War and 939 during the Continuation War, while in the rear, Soviet saboteurs murdered another 190 civilians. A further 1,400 Finns were buried in war graves after 1945 from deaths that were a direct result of military service. The number of surviving war veterans in January 2015 was 26,590. At the time of publication. Kaiho Tuomas Albin Gerdt, born 1922, was the last person alive to have received the Mannerheim Cross. Junior Sergeant Gerdt's Cross (number 95) was awarded for his actions as a combat messanger for the 7th Infantry Regiment in 1942.

Soviet casualties on the Finnish fronts were not accurately recorded, but according to the most recent research at least 134,000 dead or missing from the Winter War and 305,000 during the Continuation War have been confirmed. Some sources claim that Soviet losses in the Continuation and Winter wars could have easily exceeded a million men; certainly the number of wounded went above half a million. Calculating accurate numbers is very difficult, as these numbers were not released at the time, or were at least greatly doctored by the Soviet authorities. Following the break-up of the USSR, many archives were lost. German operations over the five years in Lapland cost them around 84,000 casualties, of which 16,400 were killed, 60,400 wounded and 6,800 missing. (Weterlund, 2007; *Jatkosotamme*, 1994)

After the Interim Peace Agreement came into effect in 1944, the Allied Control Commission was installed to enforce it. The commission was a nominally a joint Allied organisation, but in practice it was a cat's paw of Stalin. Although the commission consisted of British personnel in addition to Soviets, these did not take an active part in its operation and served mainly to legitimise the commission's authority. Even its official name was 'The (Soviet) Allied Control Commission' or SACC. The commission was led by Stalin's notorious confidant Andrew Zhdanov. Its initial tasks

included monitoring the ejection of German forces from Finland and then the payment of war reparations. The commission deliberately overestimated the size of the economy and assets in Finland in order to appropriate a larger portion of these for the Soviet Union.

The SACC also demanded war crimes proceedings against certain Finnish politicians and soldiers. The greatest significance of the war crimes trials was symbolic, and a retroactive law had to be enacted to allow the accusations levelled against the wartime leadership. It is worth noting that this kind of retrospective judicial procedure is not in accordance with the Finnish constitution and western jurisprudence. The trials were held in Helsinki in the *Säätytalo* (House of the Estates) between 15 November 1945 and 21 May 1946. The SACC interfered with the trials' procedure several times and coerced the court, under threat of direct Soviet intervention, into sentencing the accused to harsher penalties than intended. Additionally, in the final session of the trial, the court's expressed position on Soviet aggression against Finland was to be removed as it was 'libelous and anti-Soviet in character'.

The harshest sentence, 10 years' forced labour, was given to former president Risto Ryti; many thought this unjust, considering that it was his political gambit that allowed Finland to legitimise its separation from the Germans in the first place. The other sentences handed out ranged from two to six years. The convicted were popularly considered to have been punished in lieu of the rest of the nation. After the SACC left the country in 1947, many of those sentenced were pardoned or were released on parole. It is worth noting that Mannerheim was not held to trial during his process. The people considered him so dear to them that even the Soviet government did not wish to risk the potential consequences of his humiliation or conviction. Onni Petäys, the judge in charge of the committee that drew up the war crime prosecutions, shot himself a month after the conclusion of the trials.

The SACC demanded that all political organisations in Finland that were 'fascistic or Hitleristic in nature' be disbanded, including the women's Lotta Svärd, the Defence Corps (*Suojeluskunta*) and various veterans' associations. The commission also demanded the inclusion of the Finnish Communist Party in government, and in April 1945 the hard-line communist Yrjö Leino was named as Interior Minister in charge of the police and internal security. Leino had lived 'underground' throughout the war, and his taking office understandably alarmed the government.

Under Leino's control and in arrangement with Zhdanov, large portions of the Finnish Secret Police, or VALPO, were dismissed and replaced with communists and other Soviet sympathisers. At least 40 per cent of VALPO's

Finland’s borders 1917–47

staff were now either communists or SKDL national democrats.[12] At least one in ten had been convicted of treason or sedition against Finland before the Interim Peace. Over one-third of VALPO's top leadership had been also convicted of such crimes. It can be said that for these Soviet sympathisers a conviction for treason against an independent Finland was a badge of honour. Arbitrary arrests and repressive citizen terror continued until 1947 when SACC left the country and the SKDL lost much of its support in parliamentary elections. The influence of the far left was thereafter much reduced in Finland, and a significant step was taken towards establishing normal relations with the Soviet Union.

Special mention should be made of the 'Weapons Cache' case. After the Interim Peace came into effect on 19 October 1944, the demobilisation and disarming of the Finnish Army began. Given the harsh conflicts the nation had just been through, distrust of Stalin's promises amongst the Finnish officer corps remained high. The times were politically dangerous and unstable. Finland lived uncomfortably under the continuous and direct threat of Soviet occupation. Led by professional army officers, a plan to covertly store and stockpile weapons and other equipment was hatched. These caches would make possible effective guerrilla resistance against any occupying power. The enterprise became public in the spring of 1945 when Lauri Kumpulainen, a left-wing soldier involved in the stockpiling, was caught stealing food from a cache for his own use. He denounced the project to SACC's Oulu office, which led to widespread police action and arrests by VALPO. The investigation led all the way to the top of the Finnish officer corps. In the end, 1,488 people were convicted in connection with this, the largest court case ever to be held in the Nordic countries. Even to this day, weapons hidden in attics and basements during these dangerous years continue to be found.

In the end, Finland was ordered to pay war reparations of $300 million in gold over the course of six years. The Soviet Union demanded that the exchange rate of the dollar in 1938 was used in the calculations, which in 1944 almost doubled the sum. Finland also had to immediately hand over any military materiel that it had 'stolen' from the enemy during the wars, much of which was in use by the Finns. There was an urgent need to pay this vast sum on time, lest the Soviets found a new excuse for annexing the rest of the country. The war reparations made the back-breaking task

12 'SKDL' translates as the Finnish People's Democratic League. This party was founded to unite the country's left-wing elements when anti-communist laws in Finland were abolished in 1944. The party remained active until 1990.

of rebuilding even harder. Annually 15–16 per cent of the country's gross domestic product went into servicing the war reparations. Even though the reparations were harsh and were considered unjust by the Finns, they did have a revitalising effect on industry and the economy. Reparations were mostly paid in products. As a result, the shipbuilding and mechanical engineering industries in particular experienced a significant upturn. It has been estimated that in 1949, as a result of enforced development, Finland had the most advanced shipbuilding, civil engineering and steelmaking industries of the Nordic countries. The consignments of war reparation goods were so large that if all the 535 war reparation ships produced in the 15 shipyards were laid end to end, the line would have been 30km long. Other examples of material reparations were 52,500 electric motors, 1,140 electrical transformer stations, 728 locomotives and 30 fully equipped industrial factories.

'The East took our men, the Germans took our women and the Swedes took our children. But at least we are left with our war debt,' goes the common cynical saying. The train carrying the last war reparation load to the Soviet Union departed Finland on 18 September 1952. To this date, Finland is the only combatant country from World War II that paid its war reparations in full. The price of freedom had finally been met.

OPPOSITE
Unfortunately, casualties did not stop mounting up when the last shot had been fired. Between the summer of 1945 and 1952 a special mine-clearance troop was formed from civilians. Mines had been planted extensively all over Lapland. During 1945 and 1946 alone 64,161 mines, 307,598 rounds or artillery shells and 3,106 bombs were destroyed. Clearing these explosives by hand in difficult conditions cost the lives of 72 people, while a further 142 were wounded. By the early 1970s over 1,142,000 different kinds of explosives had been cleared from Lapland. Unfortunately it is still possible to find unexploded ordnance there today. (Sa-Kuva)

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APPENDIX

COMPARATIVE OFFICER RANKS

FINNISH ARMY	RED ARMY (From 1940)	WEHRMACHT
Commander-in-Chief	Generalissimus of the Soviet Union	Führer
Marshal of Finland	Marshal of the Soviet Union	Reichs Marshal
Field Marshal	Marshal (or Chief Marshal)	Field Marshal
Colonel-General	General of the Army	Colonel-General
General	Colonel-General	General
Lieutenant-General	Lieutenant-General	Lieutenant-General
Major-General	Major-General	Major-General
Colonel	Colonel	Colonel
Major	Major	Major
Captain	Captain	Captain
Senior Lieutenant	Senior Lieutenant	First Lieutenant
Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant

Notes:

Commander-in-Chief and Marshal of Finland were ranks titles were only ever held by Mannerheim
The Finnish Army never had any colonel-generals.
The rank of Generalissimus of the Soviet Union was only ever awarded to Stalin.
The rank of Reichs Marshal was only ever awarded to Herman Göring.

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